

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

A Revaluation

THE MAKERS OF MODERN LITERATURE SERIES

James Joyce by Harry Levin

Virginia Woolf by David Daiches

E. M. Forster by Lionel Trilling

García Lorca by Edwin Honig

Nikolai Gogol by Vladimir Nabokov

G. M. Hopkins by The Kenyon Critics

Edwin Arlington Robinson by Yvor Winters*

André Gide by Van Meter Ames

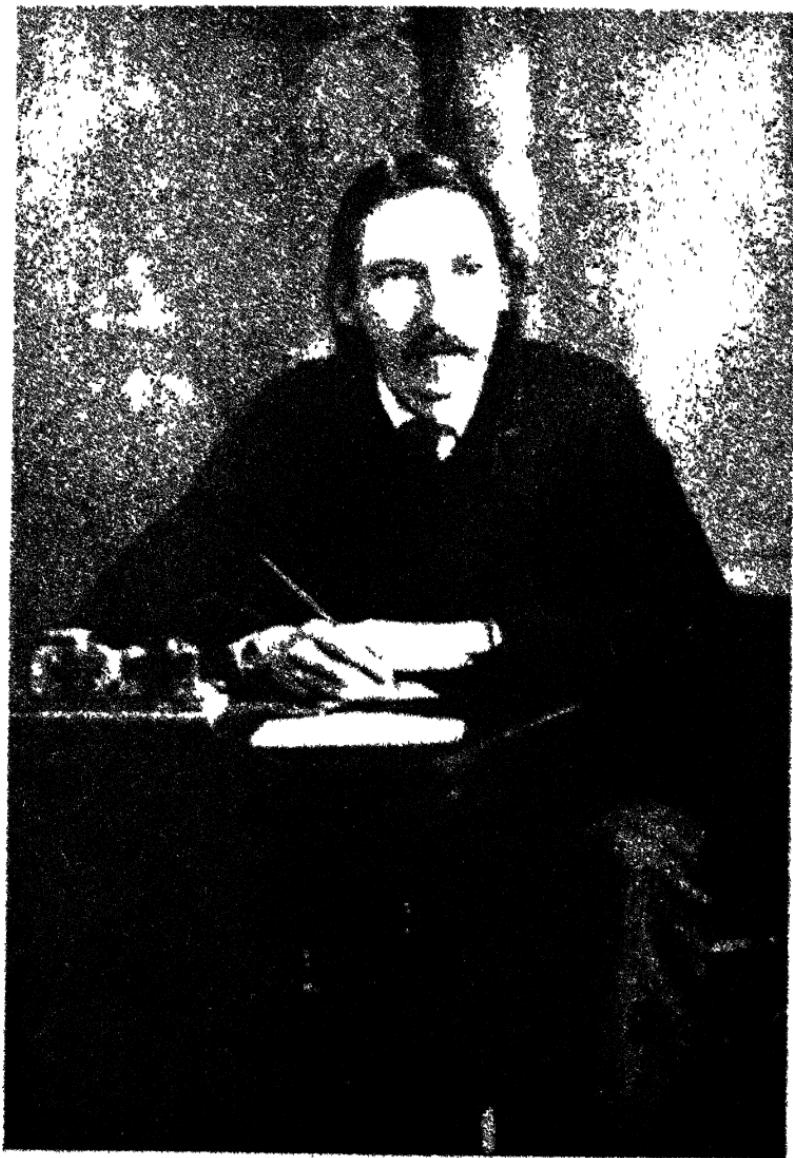
Thomas Wolfe by H. J. Muller

Bernard Shaw by Eric Bentley

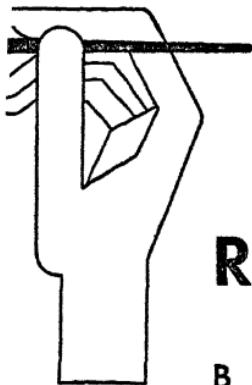
Oscar Wilde by Edouard Roditi

Robert Louis Stevenson by David Daiches

Others in preparation



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



Robert Louis Stevenson

BY DAVID DAICHES

THE MAKERS OF MODERN LITERATURE



New Directions Books - Norfolk, Connecticut

COPYRIGHT 1947 BY NEW DIRECTIONS

165968

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS

New Directions Books are published by James Laughlin

TO THE
MEMORY OF MY FATHER,
A DISTINGUISHED CITIZEN
OF STEVENSON'S CITY.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

The selections from Robert Louis Stevenson's works quoted herein are used by kind permission of Charles Scribner's Sons, who have in print the following books by Stevenson:

<i>Stevenson Biographical Edition</i>	<i>South Seas Edition</i>
THE AMATEUR EMIGRANT	THE DYNAMITER
EBB TIDE	ESSAYS
THE DYNAMITER	FAMILIAR STUDIES
ESSAYS OF TRAVEL	THE INLAND VOYAGE
FAMILIAR STUDIES	ISLAND NIGHTS
LAY MORALS	PLAYS
LETTERS (4 VOLUMES)	POEMS (2 VOLUMES)
MEMORIES AND PORTRAITS	PRINCE OTTO
PRINCE OTTO	TREASURE ISLAND
SOUTH SEAS	THE WRECKER
THE WRONG BOX	THE WRONG BOX
	MEMORIES AND PORTRAITS

Also STEVENSON POEMS, STEVENSON SHORT STORIES, THE CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSE (*Illustrated Classics*), and TREASURE ISLAND (*Wyeth Edition*)

P R E F A C E

THIS BOOK WAS NOT WRITTEN WITH THE LEISURE AND THE research facilities that a study of this kind would normally require. It was written largely in the train as I travelled back and forth between Chappaqua, N.Y. and the offices of the British Information Services in New York City, and it was finished in the scanty leisure I was able to squeeze out of a war job at the British Embassy in Washington.

I do not think, however, that any of the book's faults are attributable to the circumstances under which it was written. It is good for the critic to be emancipated from the study and the library every so often, and a work of this kind, in which the writer endeavours to give form and significance to a series of impressions accumulated over many years, may well profit by having to depend less on works of reference and more on the writer's self-questioning. At any rate, I have done what I could to give meaning to my own appreciation of Stevenson with the minimum use of secondary sources.

I have to some extent taken for granted that the reader will have a knowledge of the main outlines of Stevenson's life. So many biographies have been written, that it seemed superfluous for me to digress into purely biographical material. I have, of course, used such material where I felt that it illuminated Stevenson's writing, but

not otherwise. The reader who has no knowledge of Stevenson's life will probably gather as much information as is relevant from my pages, but if he feels the need of further knowledge it is not difficult to obtain.

This book was written with two ends in view. First, and most important, it is offered as a critical interpretation of Stevenson's writing. Secondly, it is meant as a humble contribution to that modern History of Scottish Literature on which, alas, no Scottish writer has yet thought of embarking.

Washington, D.C.
September, 1944

C O N T E N T S

1.	ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY	1
2.	ADVENTURE	32
3.	TRANSITION	74
4.	FULFILMENT	99
5.	ESSAYS AND POEMS	148
	BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE	189
	INDEX	191

1. ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

1

THE WORKS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON ARE NOT WIDELY read today. The Stevenson cult which arose after his death has almost died away, and he is now considered largely as a rather precious essayist and a writer of adventure stories. How he came to be a practitioner of two such widely differing forms of literature is a question generally left unanswered. The textbooks talk of his novels as representing an Indian summer of romantic fiction which lasted until the death of John Buchan, and it is true enough that from Scott to Stevenson to Buchan a tradition in English—or rather, Scottish—literature runs its course. But it would be unjust to Stevenson, as well as a gross oversimplification of literary history, to consider him simply as a bridge between Scott and Buchan. Indeed, Buchan's links with Scott were in many respects more direct than Stevenson's. This kind of pattern-tracing generally conceals more than it reveals.

Meanwhile Stevenson's memory lingers on in his native

city, where his associations are still comparatively green. The question of the quality of his writing is, however, rarely discussed. Interest where it survives concentrates on him as a literary figure rather than as a writer, and as a result the nature and value of his works get small attention. Yet Stevenson's writings are worth serious examination. They possess qualities of craftsmanship which make many a contemporary novelist look silly, and, further, his literary ideals and his attitude to art represent an important development in modern literature and one which has left a permanent legacy. Finally, the psychological problems involved in the development of these ideals represent as interesting a case history of a certain type of nineteenth century literary sensibility as the "psychological" critic could hope to encounter. Without any of the spectacular qualities of the more blatantly *fin de siècle* writers, with none of Baudelaire's perversity or Wilde's paradoxical wit, Stevenson nevertheless is as illuminating an example of the clash between middle class standards and the "artistic temperament" as any of the more obvious cases—more illuminating, since he is more representative, having compromised and made the adjustment, which the permanently maladjusted minority failed to do. That compromise and that adjustment explain the quality, though they do not indicate the value, of much of his work.

It is true that Stevenson had to live in Samoa in order to maintain that adjustment—just as Browning had to live so much in Italy, both physically and mentally, in order to accept Victorian England. His settlement with contemporary society, its profit and its loss to him as

artist, is nevertheless a most significant and illuminating factor in his literary development. Yet it is an aspect of Stevenson that has had little attention.

One can best begin a discussion of Stevenson by taking the popular concept of him as a "romantic" writer and considering how it arose. For all the infuriating misuse of those overwrought and by now meaningless terms, "classical" and "romantic," the term "romance" does have a very specific meaning with reference to Stevenson. He used it himself, he defined it at length in his essays, and he would have accepted its use in any account of his work. If we understand what he meant by the term, therefore, we have already progressed considerably in an investigation of the nature of his art.

Let us therefore leave aside for the moment the more obvious details of Stevenson's biography—they are available in numerous accounts—and begin with some investigation of this aspect of Stevenson's work, an aspect which developed early and lasted late. We shall find in the course of this inquiry that the more significant biographical facts will emerge incidentally, interpreted by and interpreters of the "romantic" characteristics of his literary work.

The peculiar qualities of the Stevensonian romance are perhaps best studied by taking a general view of Stevenson's short stories. For—if we except *Treasure Island* and that piece of "tushery" *The Black Arrow*—in his longer works the pure vein of romance is never to be found alone; other intentions are intermingled; the claims of psychology, history, topography and autobiography assert themselves, and the adventure story changes as it

proceeds, to become something more complicated and sometimes less adequately integrated. It is not, of course, true, that Stevenson was simply or even essentially a romancer; to diagnose his artistic character thus would be to ignore not only his preoccupations with style, but also certain less definable but extremely important aspects of his art which emerge in the first part of *The Master of Ballantrae* and, triumphantly, in the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston*. But romance, in the simple old-fashioned sense of "a rattling good yarn," was certainly one important element in Stevenson's literary character and ambitions. The exciting world of make-believe had been one (but only one) of the factors responsible for his choosing the career of author: ever since he had discovered "the Eldorado of romantic comedy" in Skelt's toy-theatre as a six-year-old boy, ever since as a sick child he had discovered the contrast between physical inaction and the adventurous world of the imagination, one of the main functions of literature had always been for him the escapist and compensatory one of presenting a thrilling, exciting, yet essentially moral life to writer and reader. In this respect, literature for him was but an extension of those childhood games of romantic make-believe that he has described so vividly in his autobiographical essays.

It is this combination of romantic adventure with optimistic morality that we see so clearly in Stevenson's short stories. As these stories are admittedly intended as pleasing wish-fulfilments and substitutes for actual inactivity, there can be no suggestion of the triumph of evil, or of death finally overtaking the hero, in such works. The morality is of the breeziest kind: people are pun-

ished and rewarded according to their intentions rather than their acts: it is, indeed, the morality of Fielding and Robert Burns and the sentimental Deists of the eighteenth century. The good heart is all. And there is hardly a single story in which Stevenson is not present, either in an ideal projection (*Prince Florizel*) or in a semi-autobiographical reminiscence (*John Nicholson*).

The short stories collectively entitled *The New Arabian Nights* are of particular interest in this connection, and throw some light on Stevenson's underlying personal ambitions. *Prince Florizel*, almost a parody of a romantic hero, possesses both rank and power and great personal charm. Everyone is deferential to him; he accepts this deference as of right with an easy yet condescending grace. And not only is he high-born, handsome and influential; he is also supremely competent. He is, indeed, the complete feudal hero, and heads a social hierarchy in virtue both of his birth and his ability.

Florizel is not, of course, a wholly serious character. He is drawn with a half-humorous—indeed, a half-satirical—touch. Stevenson is laughing a little at himself. But it is himself that he is laughing at, his own romantic and feudal ideal. And the fact that he could laugh at it—that he could recognize its incongruity in the modern world—did not mean that he was prepared to abandon it. When, like Scott at Abbotsford, he set himself up as a feudal landowner at Vailima, he was only putting into practice a theory of living which emerges time and again from his writing.

There is a close connection between Stevenson's feudal romanticism and his general politics, which were hier-

archic and conservative, though, wherever any individual case of which he had personal knowledge was concerned, generous to the point of quixoticism. A hierarchic society, replete with courteous forms and rituals yet leaving the way open for the individual to pursue a life of adventure, was the one which provided the most satisfactory background for romance. Prince Florizel is a Prince because his being so holds the romantic world together more effectively; but because he is a Prince of Bohemia in nineteenth century Paris and London, he cannot be a wholly serious figure, nor can the romances in which he figures be entirely free from the note of irony. The Prince ends up, after a revolution in Bohemia, as a London tobacconist (preserving always his charm, dignity and knowledge of the world). Yet the cigar divan over which he presides is not a mere bourgeois institution. It is a place where men come to smoke and talk and engage in reminiscence and speculation. In the modern world, Stevenson is really saying, the only road to romance is that provided by the pipe smoked comfortably over the fire. The semi-bohemian (in the modern sense this time) associations of a group of young men smoking—and Stevenson's young men are always smoking; he was an even greater devotee of tobacco than Barrie—provide the curious conjunction of comfort and adventure. The Bohemian Cigar Divan of T. Godall is the symbol of romance in an unromantic age: the symbol is made up of tobacco and conversation, of comfort and opiates. It may help to explain why Stevenson was at the same time so fond of the pipe-and-carpet-slippers interior and of the single horseman, cloaked and booted, pursuing his lonely way

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

across the common. The contrast between the two is the essence of much of Stevenson's art: and at the same time the two are not contrasted, for the book by the fireside is the only road that still runs into the world of romantic action.

The parallel with Scott suggests itself at every point: not only do the Laird of Abbotsford and the *Suenga* (Chief) of Vailima resemble each other in the paternal feudalism that each tried to re-create in his own surroundings; both were also acutely aware that the contemporary world was fundamentally inhospitable to such reconstructions and that to take them too seriously would be at once reactionary and futile. Scott's sense of this latter fact (a key to much of his work and character) is to be found in that closing scene of *Redgauntlet*, where the belated little band of Jacobite plotters are finally made to realize that their activities are less glorious than silly: in this essentially tragic scene, where romantic glory is finally conceded to be meaningless in the modern world, Scott comes close to the expression of the paradox at the heart of all romantic fiction. Stevenson, less profound and perhaps more shrewd, expressed this paradox not tragically but ironically. Stevenson had the faculty of laughing at himself, and he had at the same time a great sensitivity to public opinion. As a result, where Scott, the more fundamentally serious writer, expresses the problem tragically or near-tragically, Stevenson does it with ironic banter; and the Stevensonian equivalent of the poignant scene in *Redgauntlet* is simply the conversion of Prince Florizel into Mr. T. Godall of the Bohemian Cigar Divan.

That Stevenson consciously thought of this side of his work as an escape towards a now unattainable kind of life is made clear by frequent references in his essays and letters. "O my sighings after romance, or even Skeltery, and O! the weary age which will produce me neither!" he wrote to W. E. Henley from Bournemouth, and proceeded to give some examples of the kind of stories that would give him "romance":

"Chapter 1

'Yes, sir,' said the old pilot, 'she must have dropped into the bay a little afore dawn. A queer craft she looks.'

'She shows no colours,' returned the young gentleman, musingly.

'They're a-lowering of a quarter-boat, Mr. Mark,' resumed the old salt. 'We shall soon know more of her.'

'Ay,' replied the young gentleman called Mark, 'and here, Mr. Seadrift, comes your sweet daughter Nancy tripping down the cliff.'

'God bless her kind heart, sir,' ejaculated old Seadrift."

The next example of "how stories should begin" suggests at once that contrast between the warm interior and the cold and dangerous world outside which is a feature of Scottish story-telling at least from the time of Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*; it is at the same time stories that would give him "romance":

"Chapter 1

The notary, Jean Rossignol, had been summoned to the top of a great house in the Isle St Louis to make a will; and now, his duties finished, wrapped in a warm roquelaure and with a lantern swinging from one hand, he issued from the mansion on his homeward way. Little did he think what strange adventures were to befall him!—"

There are two (at least) kinds of romantic novelists: there are those who try to discover the romance that

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

exists, after all, in the contemporary world, as Priestley did in *The Good Companions*, and there are those who, despairing of the romantic possibilities of contemporary life, turn deliberately to another world (other in either time, space or character) and write to spite contemporary reality. Stevenson tended on the whole, though with some important exceptions, to the latter course. "After all your boyhood's aspirations," he wrote to Cosmo Monkhouse in 1884, "and youth's immortal day-dreams, you are condemned to sit down, grossly draw in your chair to the fat board, and be a beastly Burgess till you die. Can it be? Is there not some escape, some furlough from the Moral Law, some holiday jaunt contrivable into a Better Land? Shall we never shed blood? This prospect is too grey. . . . To confess plainly, I had intended to spend my life (or any leisure I might have from Piracy upon the high seas) as the leader of a great horde of irregular cavalry, devastating whole valleys. I can still, looking back, see myself in many favourite attitudes; signalling for a boat from my pirate ship with a pocket handkerchief, I at the jetty and one or two of my bold blades keeping the crowd at bay; or else turning in the saddle to look back at my whole command (some five thousand strong) following me at the hand-gallop up the road out of the burning valley: this last by moonlight."

Stevenson called the letter from which this is an extract an "astonishing gush of nonsense," and of course it is not to be taken literally as a serious expression of his ambitions. But it is illuminating as a commentary on much of his writing. "Is there not some escape?" he asks. There is—in story-telling. But he was assuming a pose in pre-

tending that the escape he longed for was escape from "the Moral Law." Stevenson, for all his quarrels with Scottish Presbyterian morality, was essentially a moralist at heart, and an optimistic morality underlies most of his writing. His quarrel with conventional Edinburgh morality was not that it was moral but that it was pessimistic and narrow. Stevenson makes this quite clear in his essay, "A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's," where he praises *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* for its "unstrained and wholesome morality" and, remarking that "there is no quite good book without a good morality," proceeds to distinguish between "puritan morality" and the broader morality with which fiction should concern itself. In occasionally pretending that what he wished to escape was the moral law, Stevenson was simply echoing the "esthetic" clichés of the late nineteenth century. In reality, no one could have been more out of sympathy with the movement we vaguely associate with "the Nineties," though he does sometimes speak the language of that movement. For he, like the rebels of the Nineties, was in revolt against contemporary bourgeois life, but it was a revolt in favor of a different kind of life, not of "art for art's sake." That different kind of life he pictured in certain of his short stories and novels: it was the life of *Treasure Island* and the adventures of Prince Florizel. And if Prince Florizel was eventually forced to become T. Godall, that was only greater proof of the necessity of literature.

The optimistic morality underlying Stevenson's writing is seen with particular clarity in *The Dynamiter*, where a serious moral problem is presented through a series of

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

adventure stories, and when the stories are finally resolved satisfactorily with a "happy ending," the moral problem disappears. Indeed, it might be said without unfairness that Stevenson uses the technique of the adventure story to make morality more amenable to optimism. A resolution on the physical level is presented as at the same time a moral solution: if the Dynamiter's victims escape and everyone, or nearly everyone, is brought together happily at the end, then the evil which originally produced the Dynamiter is finally exorcised. The device—the presentation of an optimistic morality through the adventure story—is not of course original with Stevenson. It is the very basis of nineteenth century melodrama. But Stevenson uses it with far greater subtlety than the writers of melodrama ever did, and he adds a pinch of irony sufficient to insure him against any charge of naiveté or hypocrisy. On the few occasions where Stevenson omits the touch of irony altogether—as in *The Black Arrow*—the work is, in his own phrase, "tushery."

The element of childhood reminiscence that plays so important a part in Stevenson's work is continually modified by a quite different adult strain which manifests itself sometimes by irony and sometimes in purely stylistic devices. The adult strain is more consistently visible in his short stories than in his novels. *Treasure Island* and *The Black Arrow* were written primarily for boys, and the main tone derives from his recollection of what had appealed most to his imagination as a boy. In his short stories he is largely concerned with the studied turn of phrase, the well cadenced paragraph, the mannered style. *The New Arabian Nights* is an adult work in which the

adventures appropriate to a boy's imagination are cleverly embedded in an atmosphere of irony, and the author, while sacrificing none of the exciting properties of the adventure story, manages to parade himself, a knowing and worldly figure, before the sophisticated reader.

But not all Stevenson's short stories are careful combinations of the adolescent and the sophisticated. Often they are pure allegories, where the action is strictly subordinated to the allegorical intention and is of little interest in itself. This is true of *Will o' the Mill*, in which the generalised nature of the allegory gives Stevenson a certain latitude to indulge in careful picturesque description as the story moves slowly forward. A remarkable sense of atmosphere is achieved in this story, but it is an uneconomical achievement in that its contribution to the allegory is, if not superfluous, at least ambiguous. The charm of the situation interested Stevenson as much as its meaning, with the result that the picture of rustic living is filled out in idyllic detail until the shape of the allegory is almost lost.

Stevenson was always interested in the presentation of atmosphere, but it took him a long time before he could put his gift for creating atmosphere to its most effective literary purpose. *Thrawn Janet*, for example, a short story which has been much overpraised, possesses an atmosphere disproportionate, in its nature and intensity, to the action, which is simple and even mechanical, in the conventional supernatural tradition. *The Pavilion on the Links* and *The Merry Men* are stories written to illustrate Stevenson's feeling about the atmosphere of certain parts of the Scottish coast: this is particularly true of

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

the latter, where the action is almost purely symbolic: in the former there is a not altogether successful attempt to use a flamboyant and melodramatic episode as a means of suggesting the quality of the Scottish east coast near North Berwick. As a result, the effective handling of realistic detail in the first part of the *Pavilion* loses part of its force in the face of an action which is on a wholly different level of probability.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, *Markheim*, *The Bottle Imp* and *The Treasure of Franchard* are all allegories, but very different both from *Will o' the Mill* and from each other. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* owes its popularity to the striking nature of its theme and the picturesque boldness with which it is treated. As an allegory it does not stand up very well to detailed examination, but this is unimportant beside the fact that the ringing strokes employed by Stevenson in fashioning the story give it an extraordinary vigor; it is a rough hewn and crude piece of work, but as narrative it is extremely well managed. *Markheim* is the kind of melodramatic allegory so beloved of Dickens: it might almost have been one of the manuscripts read in bed on a windy night by Mr. Pickwick. It possesses the great merit of concentration, and, unlike *Will o' the Mill*, it consistently uses the atmosphere to reinforce the meaning of the allegory. *The Treasure of Franchard* is the most like *Will o' the Mill* of all these stories, not in theme but in treatment, for here, too, the details of the narrative go beyond what are necessary to present the allegorical meaning effectively, so that the allegory fades out as we read the story, and more and more we read it as a rather charming study of French provincial life at

its most attractive, saved from sentimentality by a generous sprinkling of good natured irony. *The Bottle Imp*, written for a Polynesian audience, is simple fable, told with an appropriate simplicity of style.

That Stevenson sometimes used the short story form to try out his hand simply at the creation of atmosphere is made clear by *A Lodging for the Night*, an attempt to give substance to his impressions of the background of Villon. Like its companion piece *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*, but more effectively, it reads like a sketch for a scene in a novel: indeed, a great deal of Stevenson's essays and short stories which have for their primary function the building up of atmosphere read like lost chapters from novels—backgrounds lacking an appropriate foreground. It was not until he came to write the early part of *The Master of Ballantrae* that Stevenson showed that he could use "organically" his gift for creating atmosphere; and in the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston* he demonstrated conclusively that he had learned how to use both description and narrative to their best mutual advantage.

The three short stories which must head any list of Stevenson's work in this field are *Thrawn Janet*, the *Pavilion on the Links* and *The Beach of Falesa*. In the first two, magnificent though they are in parts, the relation of action to background and atmosphere is disproportionate. *The Beach of Falesa* is the one short story in which Stevenson is wholly successful in plotting an action that follows easily and naturally the line laid down by the atmosphere. It is the best integrated of all Stevenson's short stories. The atmosphere of shabby intrigue

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

spiced with danger, that is so much a part of trading life in the islands of the South Seas, is not only perfectly comprehended and recorded: the action at every point at once illustrates and makes inevitable the mood suggested by all the background description. The adventure story is here refined to a high degree of social and psychological subtlety without losing its quality as adventure story, a feat which, of Stevenson's contemporaries, only Conrad could emulate and surpass. *The Beach of Falesa* stands with *Weir of Hermiston* as a sign showing the way Stevenson could have developed had he lived: he was moving towards the final reconciliation of the two major strains which had run through all his work, the adolescent and the adult, action and atmosphere, adventure story and essay. This reconciliation had been attempted earlier in other ways—notably through the mixture of adventure and irony in *The New Arabian Nights*—but it was with the final solution that Stevenson found his real stature as a writer.

When Stevenson tried romance without irony in a short story he made a bad mess of it: *Olalla*, with its cardboard Spanish setting and preposterously artificial action, humorless, wooden and conventional, is a complete failure, and shows very clearly what happened when Stevenson took a theme from the schoolboy side of his talent and inflated it with an eye on an adult audience. Stevenson as a pure romancer, the Stevenson of *Treasure Island*, did best when writing in terms of a young audience, just as Stevenson the stylist and ironist could only operate in a "pure" state when writing essays for adults. The romancer could only sublimate his narrative talents

if he combined them with the products of the other side of his genius—his sense of character and atmosphere, of “local colour” and history, which eventually was to become senior partner in the curious literary firm of Robert Louis Stevenson and Son.

Stevenson’s short stories are of particular interest to anyone concerned with the relation between the two distinct sides of his talent, as they show the various attempts he made to reconcile the two, and the final, successful form which that reconciliation took. All of Stevenson’s short stories can be fitted into a discussion of this problem—except *The Body Snatcher*, that rather low piece of pure sensationalism, the two pieces written for a Polynesian audience (*The Bottle Imp* and *The Isle of Voices*), and those two somewhat low-pressed comedies, the *Misadventures of John Nicholson* and *The Story of a Lie*.

2

That the themes of nearly all Stevenson’s writing derived from his experiences in his childhood and youth has long been recognized. But the precise relation between autobiography and other forms of writing in Stevenson has not been investigated. It is clear that in spite of his vivid imagination Stevenson was incapable of writing on a theme which did not refer to some experience of his own. In his early days as an author, when he conceived of himself primarily as a writer of essays and *belles lettres*, he actually went so far as to embark on experiences for the specific purpose of writing about them afterwards.

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Thus the trips he describes in *An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey* were made simply in order to be written about when they were over, to provide copy for the essayist. This is not to say that they were not enjoyed for their own sake as well, for Stevenson naturally chose experiences which he would enjoy and about which he would therefore be able to write sympathetically. He was equally capable of writing of experiences which were undertaken not as literary adventures but as part of the necessary business of life. *The Amateur Emigrant*, heroically written in California under conditions of illness and exhaustion, represents an attempt to make literary capital out of a fairly grim experience which he undertook in a mood very different from the dilettante spirit that motivated his trips in France and walking tours in Britain.

Yet Stevenson was not one of those esthetes who professed to view all life as simply material for art. His tendency was rather to view his art as an activity capable of continually profiting from life. And although in his more purely "escapist" writing he considered himself deliberately removing himself and his readers from the realities of contemporary life, the fact remains that even such adventure stories as *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* owed their inspiration to sights and sounds that had impressed him as a child. In his essay on "The Foreigner at Home" Stevenson refers to "the sense of the nature of his country and his country's history gradually growing in the child's mind from story and from observation. A Scottish child," he continues, "hears much of shipwreck, outlying iron skerries, pitiless breakers, and great sea-lights, much of heathery mountains, wild clans and hunted

Covenanters. Breaths come to him in song of the distant Cheviots and the ring of foraying hoofs." The reader can discover in almost any of the essays in *Memories and Portraits* examples of those boyhood experiences which were later to contribute to the development of literary character and incident. "Memories of an Islet" contains the record of an experience which contributed so much both to *Kidnapped* and to *The Merry Men*: "A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured" contains that famous account of the toy theatre—Skelt's Juvenile Drama—which he so loved as a child and which was to have a permanent effect on his imagination.

Thus Stevenson's romances do not represent an attempt simply to escape from contemporary life into a world of make-believe, the world to which he was escaping was one to which the experiences—both real and literary—of childhood and youth had already given a great deal of reality, and which was to become even richer and wider in the light of his adventures as an adult. For Stevenson did make some attempt to enter that world physically as well as imaginatively, or at least he had the faculty of seeing as a romantic adventure the far journeys and changing plans which ill-health and other circumstances made necessary. Many of his more picturesque schemes—such as his plan to set up as a South Sea trader with a steamer sailing continually among the islands—did not materialise, but he did have adventures: he *did* cross America on an emigrant train, he *was* rescued from death in the Santa Lucia mountains by two old frontiersmen, he *did* settle as a kind of feudal lord in an island in the South Seas. It is true in one sense at

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

least to say that Stevenson followed his novels into another world.

This brings us face to face with a considerable paradox. If Stevenson as a romancer is set down as an "escapist," how are we to account for the fact that the life he led approximated more and more to the kind of life he wrote about? Is it not the mark of the escapist that he sits at home and only dreams and writes of adventures? What becomes of the tobacco-and-fireside ideal that we have already noticed as such a significant part of Stevenson's attitude?

The fact is, of course, that any diagnosis of literary romantic adventure as simply the stay-at-home pretending to do the exciting and picturesque things he in fact never will and never can do is far too simple to be adequate. While it does contain a certain amount of truth with reference at least to writers like Scott, Stevenson, Neil Munro and John Buchan, it is only part of the truth, and, in the case of Stevenson, part of a rather complicated truth.

The middle term between the fireside and tobacco situation and the active pursuit of adventure is the modern bohemian, whose activity consists in alternately loafing and indulging in venturesome and unconventional activity, on the one hand smoking, drinking and talking, and on the other roaming the streets in search of excitement. That Stevenson was throughout his life fascinated by the bohemian ideal is well known: it is not so well known that he practised it during his student days at Edinburgh to the fullest extent, dividing his time between loafing and going in quest of dubious adventures. Moved,

among other things, by the sense of contrast between the genteel Edinburgh thinking of his day and the heroic and picturesque traditions of Jacobite and Covenanting days, of which (especially of the latter) he heard a great deal in his childhood, he sought continually for avenues leading to a less "respectable" way of life, and first found them, without leaving home, in the "howffs" of Lothian Road, and the dark purlieus of Calton Hill where of an evening a man could disport himself with the lasses in the grassy gloom while the douce folk of Edinburgh went decently about their business below.

The writings of Mr. George Hellman and others have long since established the fact that Stevenson, like many another young man of his day and ours, went through a period of violent revolt—both theoretical and practical—against everything that Victorian Edinburgh stood for. There was more than one crisis between Stevenson and his family which left its mark on both father and son. When Stevenson embraced the bohemian way of life it was not a fad but a profession of faith. We have all seen pictures of Stevenson in smoking jacket and uncut hair, looking the perfect type of the esthetic *poseur*. But *poseur* though Stevenson was in many respects, his posing was assumed in order to symbolise either to himself or to others an attitude and a way of life which he had come to believe in as a result of much genuine heart-searching and a great deal of very real unhappiness. It is true that Stevenson's bohemian ideal was only one of many ideals which he came to hold, sometimes holding a variety of conflicting ideals simultaneously, and it is true also that in the last years of his life—in fact from the time of his marriage on

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

—the bohemian element in his ambitions faded somewhat, though they never disappeared. From the time of his youthful revolt in Edinburgh, through his stay in art colonies in France and his impoverished existence in San Francisco to his wanderings among the islands of the South Seas, Stevenson remained in many important respects an active and conscious bohemian.

His literary studies bear out the conclusion suggested by the facts of his life. His fascination with Villon, the prince of all bohemians, was deep and genuine, and manifested itself in a critical essay and two short stories. Later in life, his passionate defence of Father Damien showed an important transmutation of the bohemian ideal, and at the same time threw strong light on the original motivation in Stevenson's revolts against Victorian Edinburgh. For Damien was the moral bohemian, the man who did real good by flouting all the ethical conventions of his day. He is the modern Tom Jones, weak where the sins of the flesh are concerned but essentially good in intention and "works." The doctrine of the superiority of the good heart to social conventions and ritual, common to Fielding, Burns and Stevenson, is the clue not only to much of Stevenson's morality but also to the real nature of his quarrel with Calvinism.

On this point Stevenson was in complete agreement with Burns, and it is strange, therefore, that in his two essays on Burns (one written for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and rejected, and the other in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*) he attacks the poet's conduct with a severity which even the Edinburgh Presbyterians whose narrowness Stevenson so condemned would have hesi-

tated to show. His accounts of Burns are full of misinformation and flagrant misinterpretations. It is almost as though Stevenson, in singling out and exaggerating Burns's failings, were castigating, in the person of Burns, his own weaker self. But obviously this is an inadequate explanation of his attitude to Burns; more significant, perhaps, is the fact that Burns did not carry off his vices with swagger or braggadoccio: the story of his life and loves, though immortalised and romanticised in his own songs, in fact lacks both adventure and glamor. Burns, indeed, had the faults of the bohemian without leading the bohemian life; he was essentially a family man, whose flesh was unusually frail. Even Fielding was careful to let us see Tom Jones only *before* his marriage to Sophia.

More significant than Stevenson's attitude to Burns is his attitude to Burns's predecessor and model, Robert Fergusson. Towards Fergusson Stevenson felt throughout his life a curious kinship, and once even went so far as to declare that he himself was a reincarnation of Fergusson. Yet he did not conceal his disapproval of Fergusson's "vices," and in his references regularly exaggerated the unfortunate poet's evil doing and wrongly attributed his death directly to dissipation. It was the tragic brevity of Fergusson's life that struck his imagination—that, and the fact that Fergusson, unlike Burns, was essentially an Edinburgh poet, familiar, as Stevenson was, with the streets and haunts of Auld Reekie. Stevenson a century later was to drink and talk in some of the same pubs where Rab Fergusson had drunk and talked with his cronies. Fergusson became for Stevenson a potent symbol of the Edinburgh underground, of the de-

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

fiance of the city's genteel tradition. And as his "dissipation" was confined to drinking and talking—two essential ingredients of the Stevensonian Bohemia, though Stevenson's drink was red wine rather than hard liquor—and did not include wenching—which was *not* an ingredient of the Stevensonian Bohemia—he was the more readily acceptable. The main reason for his attack on Burns was the poet's relations with women. It seems that after his affair with Kate Drummond,* daughter of the Swanston blacksmith, which took place at the height of his student reaction against genteel Edinburgh, Stevenson gradually took on a kind of protective armour, and, like Wordsworth in later life, not only put behind him his early amours but actually created for himself a public character of prude, or something very near it.

The fact is, Stevenson accepted the artistic view—in moderation—as part of his Bohemia, his anti-world built up in opposition to middle class gentility, but, after his student days were over, refused to admit the bohemian position with respect to relations with women. Wine and song, but no women, are the characteristics of his merriest interiors. This is no doubt partly the result of his interest in adventure as such, of his boyish imagination, but it seems also to have been to some extent part of an attempt to cover up the one real failure of his life. He had fallen in love with Kate Drummond and had wanted

* The details of this affair remain obscure. According to John A. Steuart, Kate Drummond was a prostitute who reformed for love of Stevenson. In a letter to Mr. Hellman written in March, 1923, Mrs. Osbourne identified her simply as the daughter of the Swanston blacksmith and gives Claire or Clara as her real name.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

to marry her; she had been equally in love and they appear to have shared a brief idyll together; but his parents were shocked, and no money would be forthcoming to a son of theirs who married a girl of such low origins. Stevenson accepted his parents' verdict and abandoned Kate. His behaviour may have been prudent, but in his own eyes it was not heroic. After that his relations were with older women of the maternal type, and he fought shy of sex in his writing. Like Wordsworth, he devised an attitude to sex calculated to cover up the traces of his youthful passion.

These facts perhaps throw some light on Stevenson's preference of Fergusson to Burns and his refusal to admit women to his Bohemia. The fact remains—to return to our earlier point—that bohemianism, with its alternation of indolence and adventure, represented that combination of mental escape into dreaming and talking with physical escape into genuine adventure which is such an important feature of Stevenson's ambitions and which is illustrated so clearly in the setting of *The New Arabian Nights* and in so many of his letters and essays.

3

We have already referred to Stevenson's tendency to base the romantic action of his novels on scenes and emotions familiar to him in his childhood. Stevenson himself was aware of the necessity of grounding an adventure story if not in "what every schoolboy knows" at least in what every schoolboy would like to know. The adventure story is the bridge which transforms childhood inci-

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

dents from what they were to what in a romantic age they might have been. "His stories," says Stevenson of the ideal writer, "may be nourished with the realities of life, but their true mark is to satisfy the nameless longings of the reader, and to obey the ideal laws of the daydream."

Stevenson had a keen eye for picturesque sights and sounds and for suggestive names. He vented much enthusiasm over "Jerry Abershaw" the name of a hypothetical highwayman who, in spite of his creator's intentions, never found his way into a story. One kind of "probability" which Stevenson makes much of in his essays is that "fitness in events and places" in virtue of which a given locality becomes associated with an imaginary romance. In this sense Stevenson's adventure stories have a realism of their own: they represent the fitting to real scenes, or to scenes half-remembered from childhood, of their appropriate incidents. "The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. . . . Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck. . . . I have lived both at the Hawes and Burford in a perpetual flutter, on the heels, as it seemed, of some adventure that should justify the place; but though the feeling had me to bed at night and called me again at morning in one unbroken round of pleasure and suspense, nothing befell me in either worth remark. The man or the hour had not yet come; but some day, I think, a

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

boat shall put off from the Queen's Ferry, fraught with a dear cargo, and some frosty night a horseman, on a tragic errand, rattle with his whip upon the green shutters of the inn at Burford."

Stevenson's plea for the appropriately picturesque incident follows naturally from his view of romantic fiction as a bridge between experience and desire. But it is desire of a very special kind—the imaginative boy's desire for appropriate adventure, not the normal adult's desire for wish-fulfilment. The difference between Stevenson's adventure stories and the wish-fulfilment stories of the pulp magazines is that while the latter represent formulas calculated to satisfy the frustrated ambitions of millions of dull and conventional citizens, the former are highly finished and well-patterned arrangements of incidents in which the emphasis of the hero's lot is on excitement rather than on good fortune. Further, the "I" of the stories—Jim Hawkins or David Balfour—is not gifted with any unusual qualities or exceptional abilities; he simply *happens* to become involved in picturesque adventures appropriate to the setting in which they are enacted. And the difference between Stevenson's stories and a modern "mystery" is that Stevenson is more interested in the appropriately picturesque rather than in the thrilling or exciting as such. His eye is always on the locale, the environment, and though of course he does enjoy exciting incident for its own sake, the incident is always chosen in the first place because of its relation to the setting—the Hawes Inn, Rannoch Moor, the Island of Earraid. There are, of course, many modern mystery writers who have a similar attitude, though rarely to the same degree,

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

and there is certainly one motion picture director who would understand Stevenson's doctrine of "fitness in events and places." Alfred Hitchcock would agree wholeheartedly with almost everything Stevenson said in his essay "A Gossip on Romance."

Stevenson made a distinction between the romantic and the dramatic. "Drama is the poetry of conduct, romance the poetry of circumstance," he wrote. In his romantic novels, therefore, the "probability" does not lie in the relation between character and event but in the relation between incidents and setting. Character drawing in the romantic novel is therefore to be done in large, broad strokes, with none of the psychological delicacy demanded of the dramatic novel. There is no inevitability in the decisions taken by the characters, and no moral implication. Even Dr. Jekyll is not shown as taking his fateful decision to experiment in disassociation as a result of any characteristic weakness of character: his motives are indicated with the utmost brevity; the interest lies in the action only, and not in its relation to character. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is not, however, a typical Stevensonian story at all, for it has not that close linking of incident to environment that characterises "The Merry Men" and "The Pavilion on the Links."

One can see how the emphasis on style is in no way contradictory to the insistence on excitement and picturesque adventure; for the background in the light of which the adventures become appropriate and therefore, in Stevenson's sense of the term, romantic, must be painted in with the utmost effectiveness if the sense of that appropriateness is to be communicated to the reader. Fur-

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

ther, romance does not consist in adventure, but in the appropriate arrangement of adventure with reference both to the setting and to the reader; the romantic novelist must combine the art of the oral story teller with the ability to suggest physical background that one associates with a more sophisticated type of art. This is another link between the adolescent and sophisticated aspects of Stevenson's art which we have already discussed in another context.

If romance deals with fortuitous happenings, which are at the same time perfectly appropriate to the setting, while the dramatic novel deals with events arising out of the internal compulsions of character, it is clear that Stevenson's career moved slowly from the romantic to the dramatic phase as he developed. Yet he never left the romantic phase behind: there is nothing in Stevenson's view of the relation of action to environment that makes such a relation incompatible with dramatic writing. In other words, dramatic writing can include many of the qualities of the romantic and become not worse but better as a result. *Weir of Hermiston*, which marks Stevenson's final transition from the romantic to the dramatic novel, nevertheless retains all those qualities of appropriate picturesqueness which constituted the *raison d'être* of his earlier novels. Only here these qualities are not the *raison d'être* of the novel; they are enriching qualities, which give background and depth to what is essentially a study of character.

So what we have already noted as an apparent conflict between a boyish and an adult strain in his character and writing is, in part at least, and from one point of view, the

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

conflict between the romantic and the dramatic aspects of his art (to use Stevenson's terminology). There are, of course, other elements on both sides, but this is certainly one pair of different though not mutually exclusive factors in Stevenson's work. Stevenson was working towards a type of novel in which, while his sense of the picturesque could have full scope, his sense of the genuinely dramatic could also operate. *The Master of Ballantrae* was an important step forward towards this ideal, but he made a bad mess of the latter part, where the novel slips completely out of the "dramatic" category to bog down in a contrived romance which seems all the more artificial in the light of the dramatic kind of "probability" established in the earlier part of the novel. In *Weir of Hermiston*, however, Stevenson's success is complete: the romantic elements in the novel add tremendously to the effectiveness of the essentially dramatic story without postulating a conflicting kind of probability. It was Stevenson's bad luck—and ours—that he should have perfected his art only at the moment of death.

This combination of dramatic and romantic material is not the only mixture of fictional modes explored by Stevenson. In *Prince Otto* he combines romance and fable in a development which reminds us very much of the course taken by the mediaeval romance. In both cases the adventure story pure and simple gave way to a kind of romance in which the framework was adventure story but the actual choice and manipulation of incident was determined by a preconceived moral pattern, so that romance became allegory. *Prince Otto* is, of course, a very

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

different kind of allegory from the *Romance of the Rose*: the moral pattern in the former work is much more individual and evanescent, and the allegorical status of characters and incidents is much less clearly defined. But *Prince Otto* represented one way in which Stevenson tried to use the romance for more mature purposes than those allowed by the simple adventure story, and it was a way that he explored several times in his short stories. Yet in spite of his unusual capacity for this kind of writing, it did not turn out to be the one which gave his genius full scope. That was something he did not fully discover until it was almost too late.

The distinctions between various kinds of fiction that Stevenson draws in "A Humble Remonstrance," are to be considered not so much as objective critical statements as ideas which he found it helpful to play with in the course of formulating his own position as a writer. For Stevenson's literary criticism is of two main kinds: either it is the careful and detailed expression, with illustrations, of a point or group of points which are made more for the opportunities of expression that they offer than for their interest or validity in themselves, or it is a discussion which, though apparently aimed at others or centering on the works of others, is in reality a conversation with himself held for the purpose of clarifying his own mind about the nature of his own writing, or justifying his art to himself. It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that Stevenson's criticism can be called impressionist.

When one considers how early Stevenson dedicated himself to literature and how hard he worked at his craft, it is perhaps surprising that he arrived so late at the dis-

ROMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

covery of the kind of writing in which alone real greatness lies. The fact is less surprising, however, if one realizes that the writer who sets out from the beginning to be a professional author, whose ambition it is to write and be published and achieve a reputation, is much more likely to bog down in petty craftsmanship than the writer who produces a book out of the necessity provided by a compelling insight. Stevenson was for a long time much more anxious to write than to write about any particular subject. He hunted desperately for subjects, and spent more time considering the fine points of craftsmanship than burning under an inspiration that would not leave him alone. He came to literature with too many words and too few insights, and it took time for his insights to catch up with his technique. In this sense he was a classical rather than a romantic writer, for one meaning of these two overworked terms is that the classical writer is one whose apparatus exceeds his insights while the romantic writer tends to have a vision much grander than the tools he has to express it with. The greatness of either kind of writer lies in his ability to find a vision that will do justice to his technique or to develop a technique that will be adequate to give full expression to his vision. Stevenson wholly achieved this balance only in his last, unfinished work.

2. ADVENTURE

1

TREASURE ISLAND TOOK ITS ORIGIN FROM A MAP OF AN imaginary, romantic island idly drawn by Stevenson and his stepson on a rainy day in "the late Miss Macgregor's cottage," Braemar, Scotland. Stevenson had returned from his first stay in America, with memories of poverty, illness and adventure (including his marriage), and a warm reconciliation with his parents had been effected. Both he and his wife were now established in a secure family relationship with the elder Stevensons and, for the first time since his pre-university days, Stevenson was not constantly haunted by the torturing paradox which the combination of warm affection for and total disagreement with his father had created. His problem now was only the physically more difficult but emotionally less wearing one of trying to find health.

It was perhaps natural that in these circumstances he should, at least in his prose, abandon the autobiographical and semi-autobiographical kinds of writing which had

ADVENTURE

hitherto constituted his principal work and turn to the pure adventure story. He was no longer quite so pre-occupied with himself; he had established a happy *modus vivendi* with both his parents and his wife, and his imagination could roam more freely as a result. In finishing his stepson's map and romantically labelling it "Treasure Island" he entered on his second stage as a writer: up till now he had been primarily an essayist and belletrist, but from now on his principal task was to be the writing of adventure stories.

First the map and then the story: the procedure was appropriate enough. In a story of this kind you start with the romantic idea and then proceed to embody it in a suitable narrative. "Treasure Island" was the title of the map long before it was the title of the story, which was originally entitled *The Sea Cook*. The object of the quest being pre-determined, the problem was simply to provide motivation and detail. If "Treasure Island" existed, it existed obviously as an object of desire, picturesque, remote, and shrouded in mystery. The story must, therefore, be cast in one of the oldest of all narrative moulds—the quest.

This basic pattern—the quest for something desirable—can be used in a great variety of ways. The object of the quest may be of itself something of such transcendent importance that it sheds its light, as it were, continuously over the whole narrative, and every episode takes on its appropriate meaning only in the light of the meaning of the object sought. Or the thing sought may be in itself of no importance whatsoever, introduced only as an excuse for the narration of the adventures which accompany its

search. Between these two extremes an infinite number of gradations are possible. Ulysses sought his home, Jason sought the Golden Fleece, King Arthur's knights sought the Holy Grail, and innumerable adventurers of fact and fiction have sought simply hidden treasure. The difference between this basic pattern of the quest as used in the epic or other "serious" type of fiction and as used in the pure adventure story such as *Treasure Island* is just that in the former the object of the quest is itself something of supreme importance, whose possession will wholly change the life of the possessor and whose nature determines both the character and the behaviour of the searchers. In the pure adventure story, however, the thing sought has no such influence over the story as a whole. The treasure of *Treasure Island* does not attract only pirates or swaggering adventurers: it attracts both good men and bad, pirates, honest sailors, a doctor, a squire, and a respectable youngster. The treasure is neither good nor evil; it is in itself, in fact, of no importance whatsoever. It serves only as an excuse for the story, as a supreme motivation. Its final attainment comes as something of an anti-climax—part of it (the bar silver) is even deliberately left behind. And as for the disposal of the treasure, the matter is dismissed by the author in a sentence: "All of us had ample share of the treasure, and used it wisely or foolishly according to our natures."

It is essential to a story of this kind—a boy's story, told with a constant eye on a boy's imagination and desires—that the reader have from the beginning the assurance that in spite of all the breath-taking chances and hair-breadth escapes things are going to turn out all right for the hero

ADVENTURE

and his friends. There must, of course, be an element of risk—the greater the better—but the main problem must always be *how* the hero escapes, not *whether* he escapes. If his ultimate success is known in advance, no danger can be too terrific, no threat too sinister. But that ultimate success must be foreknown; for in a story of this kind the reader is meant to identify himself with the hero, and this cannot be done with assurance unless the possibility of the hero's failure and death is removed from the beginning.

Stevenson achieves this essential requirement of a boy's story very simply and effectively by the device of having the story told by the hero himself, in the first person. If the hero survived to tell the tale, then, whatever the perils he encountered, we can be sure that he escaped them. We can safely identify ourselves with him. That the suspense with which the book is crowded is going to be kept within these necessary limits is made perfectly clear by the very first sentence of the book: "Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17—, and go back to the time when my father kept the 'Admiral Benbow' inn, and the brown old seaman, with the sabre-cut, first took up his lodging under our roof."

This, the first paragraph of *Treasure Island*, is a masterly opening. It fulfils simultaneously three separate functions: it makes clear that the hero and his party survived

to tell the tale, thus confining the suspense within the limits necessary in a boy's adventure story; it strikes at once the note of romance and adventure by names such as "Squire Trelawney," "Treasure Island" and "Admiral Benbow," images like "the *brown* old seaman with the *sabre-cut*," and phrases like "there is still treasure not yet lifted"; and it sets the actual story going at once by narrating, in the concluding part of the sentence—" . . . first took up his lodging under our roof"—the first of the series of incidents which constitute the story. The story is thus set going in the very first sentence, with the proper note struck and the proper anticipations aroused. Stevenson had always been interested in the effective opening of adventure stories, as the examples he gives in his letters make clear.

Stevenson's choice of images in the opening paragraphs of *Treasure Island* is worth noting. After the opening sentence, with its immediate introduction of the "brown old seaman," the story proceeds:

"I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow; a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man; his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails; and the sabre-cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. I remember him looking round the cove and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sang so often afterwards:—

'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!'

in the high, old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars. . . ."

ADVENTURE

Though the effects here are obvious (the book, after all, was written for a boys' magazine) the technique is by no means unsubtle. The device of reminiscence is used to enhance the vividness of the images, and the images themselves are very carefully chosen, moving to a climax from "inn door," "sea-chest," "nut-brown," "tarry pigtail," "hands ragged and scarred," "sabre cut across one cheek," to the sinister words of the "old sea-song" which are to ring like a *leit-motiv* through the book. After these two lines of song the images die away to an intriguing suggestion of decay and secrecy:

" 'This is a handy cove,' says he, at length; 'and a pleasant sittyated grog-shop.—Much company, mate?'

My father told him no,—very little company, the more was the pity.

"Well, then," said he, "this is the berth for me."

We are barely past the first page and the story is well under way—not so much in terms of actual incidents, though the first of these has been told, as of anticipation, suggestion and setting. It is as difficult to remove the attention from the book at this point as at any point later on. Many a writer of mystery stories could study with profit Stevenson's method of arresting the attention of the reader at the very beginning of the book: the modern detective story, brilliantly contrived though it often is in the main body of the work, is conspicuously lacking in the Ancient Mariner touch; the reader is not held from the beginning, and the opening chapter is generally little more than a necessary penance.

Images suggestive of danger, suspicion, mystery and the picturesque having been presented to us right away, Stevenson proceeds to point out the contrast—so important to him as to so many of his predecessors in Scottish literature—between interior and exterior, between the warm inn parlour and the wind and waves outside. This gives the reader a sense of danger threatening from outside, and no sooner has this suggestion been conveyed than it is punched home with the reference to “the seafaring man with one leg” whom the sailor at the inn is half expecting with apprehension.

That contrast between interior and exterior is the only hint we are given of the difference between the normal life of the hero, Jim Hawkins, and his parents at the inn, and the new life which (though at first they do not know it) begins with the arrival of the sailor. We are told very little of the “Admiral Benbow” in normal times—that is, before the story opens. The only point that must be made is that Jim, a normal boy with nothing unusual in his background, is involved, first slowly and then precipitately, in a series of adventures in which he equips himself manfully in the midst of danger and excitement. An adventure story of this kind has little time for retrospect, for its whole effectiveness depends on its steadily gathering speed from the very first sentence, moving forward at an ever increasing pace until the climax is reached. There is another reason why it would not do to emphasize the normal routine of Jim Hawkins’ life. The “Admiral Benbow,” a picturesque eighteenth century inn situated in a lonely cove, is even without the intrusion of suspicious seamen an object of romance and glamour in

ADVENTURE

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is one of those scenes, so dear to Stevenson, which call out for an appropriate adventure story. Life at the "Admiral Benbow" even in the quietest of times could therefore hardly be held up as the most effective foil to the adventurous life led by the hero after the story commences. The "Admiral Benbow" by its very existence adds the first note of color and adventure to the story. The contrast, therefore, between Jim's life after the arrival of the seaman and his previous life can only be made implicitly, by the sense of sudden intrusion with which the seaman's arrival is presented, and by the gradual fading out, throughout the rest of the early part of the book, of the domestic images (associated with Jim's parents) which might suggest normal life. Jim's father has to die so as to give Jim that combination of independence and responsibility without which he could not appropriately take a central part in a narrative of this kind: his mother can be put away in a less drastic manner, to take care of the inn until the hero comes home.

Bill Bones, the seaman who arrived at the "Admiral Benbow" in the first paragraph, not only provides the opening incident in the chain of events which leads to Treasure Island; he is also to foreshadow the subsequent events in a manner calculated to produce the right kind of suspense, and to arouse in the reader the emotions appropriate to a "pure" adventure story. He unites in his own person the past, present and future. His present dread of encountering "the seafaring man with one leg" is the result of his past association with Treasure Island and at the same time points forward to those future

events which involve Jim and his friends in Bill Bones's past. As a technical device, Bill is a perfectly conceived character. It is he who makes the connection between the normal and the abnormal, the everyday and the picturesque, the humdrum and the adventurous, providing the bridge which enables Jim Hawkins (and therefore the reader) to cross with plausibility from the one to the other. And when Bill dies—which is not until he has brought adventure to the “Admiral Benbow” with a vengeance—his death both marks the end of the first movement of the story and motivates the second part. For it is Bill's death which enables Jim and his mother to acquire the map of Treasure Island.

Bill Bones's stay at the “Admiral Benbow” is thus a kind of overture to the story, anticipating the main themes that are to be fully brought forward later. He even produces in the good folk of the neighbourhood an émotion which is symbolic of the aim of every adventure story of this kind: “People were frightened at the time, but on looking back they rather liked it: it was a fine excitement in a quiet country life.” This is one of the few suggestions of that contrast between the normal and the adventurous life which, as we have seen, is for the most part hinted at rather than directly expressed.

After Chapter I—which is not allowed to conclude without an appearance by Dr. Livesey, whose character is built up in an admirable little incident, thus foreshadowing another aspect of the future—the pace begins to quicken. With the arrival of Black Dog it is clear that the rush of events is beyond the hero's control (it is characteristic of the adventure story that the hero does not

ADVENTURE

take control until a fairly late stage in the story: at first he is *swept* into the story, and only later is he able—since he is the hero—to establish a measure of control); and with the appearance of the blind and sinister Pew in Chapter III, with his tapping stick and “cruel, cold and ugly” voice, we know that there is no turning back for Jim Hawkins: he has been manoeuvred by chance right into the midst of a dangerous and complicated situation, and if he is to come out alive and with credit it is certainly by a different route from the one which brought him in. In the adventure story you enter purely by chance, but you get out in large measure as a result of your own contrivance.

The speed in Chapter III is terrific: we are swept along with all the emotions of suspense and excitement until Pew has handed Bill the “black spot” and Bill has responded by falling down dead, “struck . . . by thundering apoplexy.” The story is rapidly moving clear of the limited environs of the “Admiral Benbow,” and with Chapter IV danger and suspense ooze from every line: domestic images are now definitely finished with, and they are used only to suggest contrast—contrast between Jim’s situation and the normal situation of other people:

“It was already candle light when I reached the hamlet, and I shall never forget how much I was cheered to see the yellow shine in doors and windows; but that, as it proved, was the best of the help we were likely to get in that quarter. For—you would have thought men would have been ashamed of themselves—no soul would consent to return with us to the ‘Admiral Benbow.’ The more we told of our troubles, the more—man, woman and child—they clung to the shelter of their houses. The name of Captain Flint, though it was strange to me, was well enough known to some there, and carried

a great weight of terror. Some of the men who had been to field-work on the far side of the 'Admiral Benbow' remembered, besides, to have seen several strangers on the road, and, taking them to be smugglers, to have bolted away; and one at least had seen a little lugger in what we called Kitt's Hole."

In this skilful passage Stevenson not only points the contrast between domestic images of warmth and security and the terror outside in which the hero is involved; he also succeeds in linking up the feeling of terror with the already ominous name of Captain Flint, and, with the vague report of the smugglers and the "little lugger," conveys the effective suggestion that these external and normally remote forces of piracy and evil are slowly but surely closing in on Jim Hawkins. The return to the inn and the searching of the dead sailor's body become, under these circumstances, acts of heroism or at least of courage, calculated to begin the transformation of Jim from a passive to an active character. This transformation, which is most important for the structure and pattern of the story, reaches its climax in Part V, where Jim slips away from his companions and for a while plays a lone hand. In Chapter XXVI Jim achieves his full stature as hero, and henceforth he need play no major part in the story.

Chapter V gives a preliminary skirmish between the forces of good and evil—presented rather as "our side" versus the others, in true adventure story style—which serves both to heighten the already excited atmosphere and to foreshadow the future. The aura of romance is deftly thrown over the incident to prevent it from appearing as a mere brawl:

ADVENTURE

"The window of the captain's room was thrown open with a slam and a jingle of broken glass; and a man leaned out into the moonlight, head and shoulders, and addressed the blind beggar on the road below him."

Pew, the blind beggar, having served his purpose, is killed off, and in the following chapter Jim is brought together with Dr. Livesey and the Squire in order to provide the proper machinery for moving the story into the more picturesque environment of Treasure Island itself. The map of the island that had been found on the dead captain's body, the evidence that treasure is hidden there, the determination of the Squire to fit-out a ship and find it, accompanied by the doctor and Jim, provide the means of gracefully leaving the first part of the story behind and moving out smoothly to greater adventures.

There is a final brief return to a domestic interior as the Squire, Dr. Livesey and Jim talk things over at the Hall, and this serves to emphasize once again the contrast between comfortable life at home and the adventurous life on which Jim and his friends are about to embark, so that the reader has no chance of missing the significance of the structural watershed that divides the dangerous quest for treasure from the comfortable activities of ordinary folk in England: "The servant led us down a matted passage, and showed us at the end into a great library, all lined with bookcases and busts upon the tops of them, where the squire and Dr. Livesey sat, pipe in hand, on either side of a bright fire." The fire and Dr. Livesey's pipe are characteristic Stevensonian symbols of the good life (domestic variety), just as lonely inns by the coast, ships, maps, and pirates are symbols of the good

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

life (department of romantic adventure). We have noted how Stevenson found it impossible to point the contrast between normal living in the "Admiral Benbow" and the new adventurous life that came to Jim after the appearance of Bill Bones: the "Admiral Benbow" was itself a symbol of romance and adventure. To get the contrast finally pointed, before the voyage starts and we set off for Treasure Island itself, we have to look in at the Hall and see the Squire at home surrounded by the comforts appropriate to the well-to-do bachelor.

In the scene at Bristol which follows, Stevenson cunningly puts the reader into the possession of significant information which is withheld from the chief characters—namely, knowledge of the real nature of the crew and of Long John Silver's true intentions. This is achieved quite simply by sketching in the character of the Squire as unsuspecting, boyish, and good-naturedly egotistical, and at the same time making use of Jim's youth and lack of knowledge of the world in letting him experience something which is revealing to the reader but not to Jim. In other words, in accordance with Stevenson's doctrine of the function of character drawing in a romance (as distinct from a dramatic novel or a novel of character), he gives his actors only as much individualization as will provide them with the necessary motives for key actions.

The fact that the reader now knows what neither Jim nor his friends know provides him with the necessary suspense to make the otherwise rather dull journey out of Bristol full of excitement. It is only when the voyage is almost over that Jim, hiding in the apple barrel, overhears the conversation of the pirates, and the truth about

ADVENTURE

Long John Silver and his fellow adventurers is finally out. The hints that had been provided by Billy Bones and his adventures at the "Admiral Benbow" now take on, in retrospect, a new meaning; past and present are joined together to promise an exciting and dangerous future. In this game of balancing knowledge against ignorance Stevenson shows himself very adroit. First the reader and Long John Silver's gang know the truth, while Jim and his friends remain in ignorance; then Jim and his friends learn the truth about Silver's gang, but Silver and his gang do not know that Jim and his friends know. It is only very much later, when the action on the island is rapidly reaching its climax, that Jim in a fit of desperate bravado blurts out to the pirates the truth about his overhearing their conversation in the apple-barrel. This careful balancing of knowledge and ignorance greatly enriches the possibilities of suspense, and Stevenson makes good use of the opportunities he thus provides for himself.

The whole texture and atmosphere of the story changes once Treasure Island has been reached. No longer is the sense of adventure conveyed by the impinging of the picturesque and the unfamiliar on the familiar: everyday life has now been left altogether behind, and the story can now be told simply in terms of the rise and fall in the fortunes of either side. The arena has been cleared of all superfluous characters and scenery. We are told enough of the physical features of the island to provide an adequate setting for the drama that is being played out against it, and that is all the author now requires. Stevenson has used one of the favourite recipes of writers of adventure

stories: he has set the protagonists alone on an uninhabited island. The recipe requires, however, that one new character be introduced on the island, some unexpected and unpredictable character who will be able to play a *deus ex machina* part in the plot if necessary. Such a character is Ben Gunn, who plays a minor yet decisive role in the story. His unknown history and unforeseeable actions prevent the story from degenerating into a mere conflict between good and bad characters of which the outcome can be calculated in advance.

In keeping Jim moving back and forth between the two groups—the Squire's group and Long John Silver's—Stevenson manages to keep a bi-focal view on the action, as it were. It is important that the pirates are not considered altogether as villains, for they, after all, provide the principal romantic interest and in a boy's story are bound to be in some degree and in some sense sympathetic characters. Stevenson solves this problem in part by the character of Long John Silver, a cunning combination of charm, strength and black villainy (W. E. Henley without Henley's virtue, Stevenson asserted) and reinforces this solution by keeping Jim in closer touch with Long John than with the "good" party. What is at stake is thus not simply the finding of the treasure by Jim and his friends, nor even their successful escape from the pirates. A much more complicated pattern of suspense is set up, which, while leaving the issue of the physical safety of the hero in doubt long enough to get some excitement out of it (though, as we have seen, not absolutely in doubt, for we knew in advance that Jim, the Squire and Dr. Livesey have all come safely out of the

ADVENTURE

adventure), at the same time poses the subtler problem of the fate and intentions of Long John.

The problem to be faced by any writer of a boys' adventure story of this kind is that, while the struggle has to be essentially between the good and the bad, the real romantic interest tends to lie with the bad. Picturesque villainy is naturally more appealing in such a context than everyday virtue, and the author's task is to enlist the sympathies of the reader at the same time on the side of virtue and of the picturesque. This can be done, as it has been done in recent American popular boys' fiction and films, by substituting the G-man for the gangster and insisting that to live virtuously is often to live picturesquely and dangerously at the same time, but it makes for a much richer narrative texture if the problem is faced by shading the gradations of virtue and vice from the completely unsympathetic villain (like Israel Hands) to the complete hero (like Dr. Livesey) and by keeping in the centre of the picture a character like Long John who, though villainous in intention, is often admirable in action. It becomes important, when such a technique is employed, to detach this half-way character from the side of evil, to which he originally belongs, and, by some development of the plot, to put him in a relation with the other side which none of his companions can achieve. Stevenson has managed all this very deftly, and the part played by Silver in the latter part of the book is sufficient to arouse the reader's admiration for certain aspects of his character unmixed with any approval of villainy as such. The non-committal end of Silver—neither full fortune, like Jim and his friends, nor full misfortune,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

like the other pirates—lays the final emphasis on his special function in the plot.

Jim's adventure with Israel Hands, and his final success in saving the *Hispaniola*, gives him sufficient stature to enable him to stand for the reader in a boy's adventure story—to serve, that is, as the character with which the reader identifies himself as he reads—without removing him too far into the realm of the heroic so that he ceases to be recognizable as an ordinary boy. His good fortune is due as much to luck as to skill. "There is a kind of fate in this," Dr. Livesey tells him when he hears that the ship is safe as a result of Jim's activity. "Every step, it's you that saves our lives." And Captain Smollett tells him later: "You're a good boy in your way, Jim; but I don't think you and me'll go to sea again. You're too much of the born favorite for me." Jim has courage and resourcefulness, but it is not these qualities alone that enable him to save himself and his friends. He has a kind of beginner's luck. There are several reasons why Stevenson should have deliberately kept Jim from achieving too impressive a heroic stature. The obvious one is that he is to stand for the boy reader and must not therefore move too far above such a reader's conceivable accomplishment. Another reason is that he must not compete in picturesque bravado with Long John Silver nor in calm adult competence with Dr. Livesey. He is the ordinary boy thrown into the midst of adventure by pure chance and acquitting himself very creditably. In the course of the story he develops from a purely passive character into an experienced and resourceful campaigner. This develop-

ADVENTURE

ment takes place under the reader's eyes, and the reader can see it as natural and inevitable in the circumstances. With his outwitting of Israel Hands Jim achieves his full stature as a man of action, just as in his refusal to go back on his word and escape from Silver and his men with Dr. Livesey he achieves his full moral stature.

It is a standard and necessary device in this kind of adventure story that the fortunes of the hero should be at their most critical point at the very moment when help arrives. Jim and Long John Silver face the wrath of the five pirates alone, and their fate seems sealed, but a last minute rescue is effected by the Doctor, seaman Gray, and Ben Gunn, whose action is, of course, appropriately prepared for and explained. It is important that at this critical juncture in the story Jim and Long John Silver are joined together against the five pirates, even though Silver is—or was—himself the leader of the pirates. The careful way in which Stevenson manoeuvres Silver into this position is another of his devices for keeping the reader's sympathy on the side of the picturesque, even though the picturesque is bound up with evil. Circumstances force Long John Silver to range himself on the side of Jim and his friends against the others, and thus we are able to contemplate and enjoy the good points in Silver's character without feeling that we are letting our sympathies fall on the wrong side.

The book ends, as it begins, with a deliberate pushing of the whole story into the past: it is a retrospect, a thing finished and done with, something to be talked over by the fire on a winter's night:

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

"The bar silver and the arms still lie, for all that I know, where Flint buried them; and certainly they shall lie there for me. Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts, or start upright in bed, with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: 'Pieces of eight! pieces of eight!'"

Thus once again the two aspects of Stevenson's bohemian ideal are brought together: talk and reminiscence on the one hand, and actual adventure on the other. The story begins and ends as a recollection, from the comfort of the present, of the adventures and discomforts of the past. The pattern is, in a large sense, the same as that of *The New Arabian Nights* where cigar smoking bachelors narrate their adventures in the comfort of Mr. Godall's Bohemian Cigar Divan.

Treasure Island first appeared in serial form in *Young Folks* from October 1881 to January 1882, as by "Captain George North." Stevenson followed this up with another serial for the same boys' magazine in 1883. *The Black Arrow: a Tale of Two Roses* was also attributed to the fictitious Captain, in spite of the incongruity of attributing a highly artificial "historical" romance to a bluff seaman. *The Black Arrow*, however, need not detain us: Stevenson described it as "tushery" and he was right. It is an uninspired and mechanical piece of work, written in a hurry to make some badly needed money, with fake mediaeval dialogue, and all the tricks of the trade employed with a sullen determination that robs the book of all life and glory. It has neither the technical brilliance of *Treasure*

ADVENTURE

Island nor the elemental power of *Thrawn Janet*, and if no worse it is certainly no better than hundreds of other boys' books of the period.

2

The next adventure story in which Stevenson really put his talents to work was *Kidnapped* (for neither *Prince Otto*, *The New Arabian Nights*, nor *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, all of which were published between *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, are adventure stories in the sense here intended). *Kidnapped* is a much more complicated story than *Treasure Island*, and came into existence as a result of a much more complex set of factors. It is not the simple story of a quest, or the mere recounting of exciting risks run by the hero. There is no straightforward pattern of protagonist, antagonist and intermediate character, nor is the book written round one picturesque idea or group of ideas. Its origins lie in Stevenson's studies in Scottish history, especially in Highland history in which he was much interested; in his interest in Scottish topography; in his pondering over the murder of Colin Campbell of Glenure and the whole atmosphere of post-1745 Scottish affairs; in certain memories of his childhood and youth; in his early reaction to the picturesque suggestions of Queensferry and its Hawes Inn (mentioned in "A Gossip on Romance"); and in a host of indefinable feelings about Scotland and Scottish traditions which engulfed him on his return to Scotland from America in 1880. As a result, the book is an indispensable quarry for a critic interested

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

in the psychological and biographical background of Stevenson's novels, and it is also a wholly unique species of adventure story.

The aftermath of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 has never failed to prove attractive to Scottish novelists in search of material. The picturesque and hopeless loyalty of the defeated and hunted Jacobites, the swift rise of a folk tradition which redefined the Jacobite movement in a wholly unhistorical but extremely attractive manner and the expression of that tradition in some of the finest folk songs and imitation folk songs in European literature; the fate of the Highlands after the "Forty-Five" and the resultant association of the Hanoverian victory with the vanishing of Scotland's most characteristic and most picturesque form of life; the innumerable stories of hair-breadth escapes and individual acts of heroism and devotion; and the rich nostalgic emotions to which a lost cause and a disinherited dynasty are always likely to give rise—all these factors combined to give the Jacobite movement a place in Scottish sentiment which the bald facts of history do not warrant at all. But the later association of Jacobitism with Scottish glory and independence—acquiesced in, to some extent, even by Scotsmen in the Protestant Whig tradition—was extremely fruitful for Scottish literature in that it provided a set of symbols for the literary presentation of much that was picturesque and tragic in modern Scottish history. The two poles of modern Scottish sentiment are the Covenanting tradition and the Jacobite tradition, and it is a tribute to the force of the latter that even those bred, as Stevenson was, in the former turned to the Jacobites when in search

ADVENTURE

of material to use in presenting Scotland to the world.

But of course *Kidnapped* is not simply a Jacobite romance: indeed, the Jacobite element is employed only for background and atmosphere, and the principal character is only accidentally entangled in the aftermath of the "Forty-Five." It is not even true to say that the murder of Colin Campbell of Glenure provides the mainspring of the plot, for the function of the murder is not to initiate or motivate the central action so much as to provide a means of keeping it going once it has got well under way. The central situation of the story is the Lowland boy forced by circumstances to travel in the Highlands. Stevenson, a Lowlander, had for some time before embarking on *Kidnapped* been deeply interested in the Highlands, even to the point of erroneously imagining himself to be of Highland stock, and to build a novel around the Highland journey of a Lowland boy gave him the opportunity of presenting Scotland in the manner best suited to his own situation with regard to the country.

Stevenson's knowledge of the Highlands and of the Gaelic element in Scottish history was very superficial, and he therefore safeguarded himself against blunders by the dramatic device of presenting the Highlands through the eyes of a Lowlander who saw this part of Scotland for the first time. David Balfour, with his Whig Presbyterian upbringing, is brought into intimate contact with Alan Breck, Stewart, Catholic, Highland and Jacobite, and this juxtaposition is itself a lively symbol of eighteenth century Scotland. It also excuses Stevenson from giving that objective account of Gaelic Scotland which he was unable to give through lack of knowledge.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

The historical situation is presented symbolically: a representative of the Covenanting tradition in Scots history is manoeuvred into close friendship with a representative of the opposing Jacobite tradition, and this strange friendship—which is at the same time a strong opposition—illuminates one of the central paradoxes of Scottish history.

Unfortunately, Stevenson's device of focussing Gaelic Scotland through the sensibility of a Lowlander is not adequate to compensate altogether for his ignorance of Highland psychology and culture. Because he was not at all sure of what Alan Breck was—of how he would really have appeared to a young Lowlander of his own day—he falls back on the conventional caricature of the proud and volatile Celt. Alan, therefore, though he is in a sense much more in the forefront of the story than David, is by no means such a convincing character. If the defect were purely historical, it would not, of course, affect *Kidnapped* as a work of fiction; but Alan's historical inadequacy is reflected, though to a lesser extent, in his inadequacy as a character in a novel: he is in a great degree an artificial, mechanical construction put together out of English popular notions concerning the Gael.

Stevenson did not embark on *Kidnapped* without a considerable amount of research. He read a great deal about the Appin murder, including the printed account of the trial of James Stewart (James of the Glens) which he bought in Inverness. His interest in Highland history and traditions was very real. Unfortunately, he had altogether too cavalier a view of what constituted a knowledge of the Highlands, actually having the temerity to

ADVENTURE

maintain that a knowledge of Gaelic was unnecessary to anyone purposing (as at one time he did) to write a history of the Highlands. He was ignorant and contemptuous of Gaelic literature, and had no knowledge whatever of the peculiarities of Gaelic speech and the psychology that underlies them.

These deficiencies in Stevenson's information were no necessary bar to his writing a good novel with a Highland setting. He knew the Highland countryside, he knew the facts of its history, and he had a strong personal emotion with reference to it. The critic of *Kidnapped* is not, in his capacity as literary critic, seriously upset by the fact that Alan Breck speaks English like a Lowland Scot and not like a Highlander whose native language is Gaelic (indeed, how many critics could tell this?). But the literary critic cannot help noticing a certain thinness in the handling of Alan's character, and a shallow theatrical quality in Alan that does not represent his character so much as his creator's inability to see very deeply into it. The careful and unpretentious sobriety with which the character of David Balfour is handled shows up strongly the less adequate way in which Alan is treated.

It might be argued that Alan Breck is the Long John Silver or even Pew of *Treasure Island*, that he is a conventional figure of romance whose character is so handled that it stands in immediate contrast to the sober normality of the narrator. But *Kidnapped* is a very different kind of story from *Treasure Island*; the latter is the simple story of a quest involving a conflict between "normal" virtue and picturesque evil, while the former is a historical-cum-topographical novel which uses the adventures of the

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

hero in order to present in part at least the spirit of an age and of a country. The adventures narrated are not only interesting in themselves and in the varying emotions of suspense and excitement which they arouse, but are also important in that they provide the author with the means of guiding the hero through a large part of Scotland at one of the most paradoxical and most characteristic periods of its history. Alan, therefore, unless we are to regard him as a mere picturesque piece of Scottish scenery, requires some profundity in his characterisation if he is to play his part with full effect in this literary commentary on Scotland.

For a literary commentary on Scotland is just what *Kidnapped* is, in one of its aspects. The story of David Balfour's search for his inheritance is the merest piece of machinery, used to open and to close the book. The heart of the book is David's and Alan's tour through Scotland. *Kidnapped* is a sort of illustrated guide book to Scotland in 1751, a picture of Scotland after the "Forty-Five."

But it is not only that. The effective and skilfully narrated opening, with its authentic picture of Cramond and Queensferry in an eighteenth century June, and the powerful scenes played by David and his uncle, stand apart from the later section of the book. And the scenes on board the *Covenant*, with their big climax in the siege of the round-house, and their grim ending with the wreck of the brig, also have a separateness and a unity of their own. The whole of *Kidnapped* falls into four parts. The presentation of David Balfour, his adventures at the House of Shaws and at Queensferry, his kidnapping and his further adventures on board the *Covenant* and on the

ADVENTURE

Island of Erraid, are in a sense extrinsic to the story as it eventually develops. The incidents here derive in large part from Stevenson's childhood memories and from the associations which certain places had for him in his youth. There follows a sort of interchapter, connecting the time when David leaves the island of Erraid on which he had thought himself cut off from the mainland, and his meeting again with Alan Breck just after Colin Campbell's murder. Then comes the second main section of the book —the murder of Colin Campbell and the dangerous journey of Alan and David for which the murder provides motivation. The third section begins when the danger of the two men being caught by the redcoats has diminished and the book threatens to become a mere Baedeker of Scotland: Stevenson introduces the famous quarrel between David and Alan which gives a new emotional impetus to the story and enables the heroes to be taken further through Scotland on their illustrated tour, without any loss of interest on the reader's part. The fourth and concluding part brings David back again to the Lowlands and his patrimony.

The baldest summary of the plot of *Kidnapped* will make clear how difficult it is to find the essential unity of the story. David Balfour on the death of his parents seeks out his uncle, who treats him with suspicious hostility and finally has him kidnapped by sailors who are to sell him as a slave overseas. The uncle's motive is made clear early in the story when we discover that David has the legal right to the estate which his uncle dwells on as his own. Early in its voyage the ship carrying David overseas runs down a small boat and rescues from it Alan

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Breck, a proscribed Jacobite who has returned to Scotland on one of his periodic secret visits. David discloses to Alan a plot by the crew to murder him for his money, and David and Alan together successfully fight and defeat the crew. The boat is finally wrecked off the west coast of Scotland: David manages to reach a little island alone, and there he stays in misery for some days until he discovers that at low tide it is possible for him to cross over to the mainland. He crosses over, finds a trail Alan has left for him to follow, and, after meeting with a number of typical Highland characters of the period, eventually discovers Alan in circumstances which throw upon them both strong suspicion of having murdered the unpopular Colin Campbell of Glenure. David and Alan have therefore to flee the king's forces together, and in the course of their joint wanderings through Scotland, which occupy the bulk of the book, David learns a great deal about the state of the Highlands after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, both from Alan's conversation and from his own observation. Alan and David quarrel and then make up again. They finally reach the Lowlands, after the reader has been taken on a tour through much of Scotland, and David establishes his identity and his claim to his ancestral property. He helps to get Alan out of the country, and determines to do what he can to prevent James Stewart, whom he met on his wanderings, from being falsely convicted of Colin Campbell's murder.

Here the book abruptly ends, and the critics are left with many questions including that of whether David or Alan is the real hero of the story. A more serious problem is posed by the relation between the different threads

ADVENTURE

of the story. The framework—the relations between David and his uncle—has all the qualities of a straight adventure story. The dispossessed heir, the plot against him that goes astray, the picturesque incidents on land and sea—if the story as a whole followed the pattern laid down by these elements in the early chapters, the only function of David's relations with Alan would be to keep the fate of the hero in exciting doubt, and the reader in suspense, until by a combination of luck and ingenuity he is able to outwit his enemies and establish himself in safety and fortune. Yet if we are to look on the subsequent chapters of *Kidnapped* in this light, it is clear that there is much in them that is irrelevant and tedious.

It seems clear that Stevenson, as the story was germinating in his mind, approached it at different times from different points of view. There can be no doubt that his feeling for the Hawes Inn at Queensferry, and the associations which it suggested for him, provided one of his starting points. Nevertheless the Hawes does not seem to have suggested the story of *Kidnapped*, but only to have been utilized once the story had been roughly mapped out. In a letter written to his father from Davos in the autumn of 1881—while he was still working at *Treasure Island*—Stevenson indicates what might well be the original inspiration for *Kidnapped*:

"It occurred to me last night . . . that I could write
The Murder of Red Colin,
A Story of the Forfeited Estates.

This I have all that is necessary for, with the following exceptions:—
Trials of the Sons of Rob Roy with Anecdotes:
Edinburgh, 1818, and

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

'The second volume of *Blackwood's Magazine*.

You might also look in Arnot's *Criminal Trials* up in my room, and see what observations he has on the case (Trial of James Stewart in Appin for murder of Campbell of Glenure, 1752); if he has none, perhaps you could see— O yes; see if Burton has it in his two volumes of trial stories. I hope he hasn't; but care not; do it over again, anyway."

This was to be a historical article, calculated to promote his chances for the chair of Constitutional History at Edinburgh, for which, with considerable audacity, he had applied. The article was never written, but he made good use of the material in *Kidnapped*.

It is also worth remembering, that since the end of 1880 Stevenson had been meditating a History of the Highlands, a rough scheme of which he had sent to his father in December of that year. The second section of the rough plan was to deal with "The Heroic Age" and the three chapter-headings read: "(1) Duncan Forbes of Culloden, (2) Flora Macdonald, (3) The Forfeited Estates; including Hereditary Jurisdictions; and the admirable conduct of the tenants." And though Stevenson, as we have noted, was ignorant of Gaelic and of many essential aspects of Highland life and psychology, he had read considerably in eighteenth century sources and he had a passionate personal feeling about Highland history.

We have digressed to recollect briefly the sources of *Kidnapped* in Stevenson's previous reading and interests not because such considerations can themselves provide a proper analysis and appreciation of the novel, but because an awareness of how the various elements which went to make it up were ranged in Stevenson's mind be-

ADVENTURE

fore he embarked on the work will help us to understand the problems he faced in shaping them into a well-constructed work of fiction. *Kidnapped* was a mould into which he poured a great variety of material: recollections and imaginations of his childhood; reading in eighteenth century Scottish history; and emotion about Highlanders and their fate after the "Forty-Five."

We have seen that if we consider *Kidnapped* simply as an adventure story—the adventures of the dispossessed heir in his attempts to recover his heritage—we will be unable to explain why such a large proportion of the book is given up to an almost anecdotal description of Highland scenes and characters of 1751, why the journey of David and Alan is prolonged beyond the point required for the proper manipulation of the hero's fortunes, why there is dubiety among the critics concerning the identity of the true hero, and why Stevenson found himself involved in a story somewhat different from what he had planned and therefore found it necessary to break it off midway and make a whole book out of what, in the original plan, was to be only the first half. For *Kidnapped* is a complex novel, with complex origins.

The book was begun simply as an adventure story on the model of *Treasure Island*, but, as Stevenson wrote to Watts-Dunton, the characters of David and Alan came alive in his hands and sent the novel on a different road. Alan, as has been shown, hardly "came alive" in any very full sense; but it is clear that his character suggested to Stevenson the possibility of using the novel to convey all that sense of Highland history after the "Forty-Five" of which he was so full. Alan is the link not only between

adventure and history (for in some degree *Kidnapped* is a historical novel) but also between adventure and topography. It is Alan and his associations that enable Stevenson to take his reader on a historical tour through a considerable area of Scotland of the 1750's.

On the framework of an adventure story Stevenson has constructed a novel, one of whose main themes is the tragic atmosphere of the mid-eighteenth century Highlands. It is true that the note of tragedy is never allowed to emerge fully, for to allow it to do so would have rent the fabric of the whole book. But, in spite of the serio-comic braggadocio on the surface, the tragic note does lie underneath, to reveal itself in glimpses, as in the dismal scene at the home of James of the Glens—and even in the character of Alan himself, for with all his deficiencies of character he does illustrate the pathetic if not tragic waste and frustration involved when gesture takes the place of moral purpose. Alan foreshadows the tawdry apotheosis of the kilt and whisky which has been all that Gaelic Scotland has ever received in compensation for the loss of her vitality. One might even argue that the very artificiality and theatricality of his character is a symbol of the fate of the Highlands, which have survived to breed "romance" while forbidden to support men.

There can be no doubt that Stevenson was aware of the larger issues with which his novel, in spite of itself, became involved; but it would surely be a mistake to see him as consciously endeavouring to give depth to the story by introducing a tragic undertone. It was the more purely picturesque aspects of the Highlands at this period by which he was consciously attracted—the death of the

ADVENTURE

Red Fox, Cluny in his cage, the Heugh of Corrynakeigh, the quarrel on lonely Rannoch Moor. These were to be treated in the same spirit as David's first interview with his uncle and his kidnapping on the brig *Covenant*. It was partly because the mechanics of the adventure plot were in themselves somewhat bare, and partly because Scottish topography meant more to Stevenson than he first realized when he planned to take his hero through large tracts of the Highlands, that the profounder suggestions crept in.

The narrative of *Kidnapped* thus has a texture which varies greatly as the novel proceeds. While in *Weir of Hermiston* the sense of history and of scenery is perfectly welded to all the other aspects of the story, making the narrative texture richer and more subtle than anything else in Stevenson, in *Kidnapped* the functions to which history and topography are put vary in different parts of the story. The speed and grace of the opening chapters are in Stevenson's best narrative style—but the style of a simple adventure story, not of the richer kind of novel such as *Weir of Hermiston*. The first paragraph, with its apparent artlessness, is reminiscent of the opening of *Treasure Island*:

"I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in the month of June, the year of grace 1751, when I took the key for the last time out of the door of my father's house. The sun began to shine upon the summit of the hills as I went down the road; and by the time I had come as far as the manse, the blackbirds were whistling in the garden lilacs, and the mist that hung around the valley in the time of the dawn was beginning to arise and die away."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

The simple rise and fall of the sentences here, the sheer tilt of the second sentence, represent the art of simple narrative at its best.

The account of David's adventures at the House of Shaws is told in a similar style, complicated somewhat by the dialogue, but essentially forthright and simply cadenced:

"'Well,' he said, 'let's begin.' He pulled out of his pocket a rusty key. 'There,' says he, 'there's the key of the stair-tower at the far end of the house. Ye can only win into it from the outside, for that part of the house is no finished. Gang ye in there, and up the stairs, and bring me down the chest that's at the top. There's papers in't,' he added.

'Can I have a light, sir?' said I.

'Na,' said he, very cunningly. 'Nae lights in my house.'

'Very well, sir,' said I. 'Are the stairs good?'

'They're grand,' said he; and then as I was going, 'Keep to the wall,' he added; 'there's nae bannisters. But the stairs are grand underfoot.'

Out I went into the night."

Or consider this:

"Away I went, therefore, leaving the two men sitting down to a bottle and a great mass of papers; and crossing the road in front of the inn, walked down upon the beach. With the wind in that quarter, only little wavelets, not much bigger than I had seen upon a lake, beat upon the shore. But the weeds were new to me—some green, some brown and long, and some with little bladders that crackled between my fingers. Even so far up the firth, the smell of the sea water was exceeding salt and stirring; the *Covenant*, besides, was beginning to shake out her sails, which hung upon the yards in clusters; and the spirit of all that I beheld put me in thoughts of far voyages and foreign places."

ADVENTURE

A similar style—the true style of the adventure story, picturesque incident and appropriate setting reinforcing each other's effectiveness—prevails until the end of Chapter XIII. But when David is cast ashore on the islet the pace slackens, the sentences move more slowly, as though they are trying to take in more than the actual narrative as they proceed:

"I used to watch this smoke, when I was wet and cold, and had my head half turned with loneliness; and think of the fireside and the company, till my heart burned. It was the same with the roofs of Iona. Altogether, this sight I had of men's homes and comfortable lives, although it put a point on my own sufferings, yet it kept hope alive, and helped me to eat my raw shell-fish (which had soon grown to be a disgust) and saved me from the sense of horror I had whenever I was quite alone with dead rocks, and fowls, and the rain, and the cold sea.

"I say it kept hope alive; and indeed it seemed impossible that I should be left to die on the shores of my own country, and within view of a church tower and the smoke of men's houses. But the second day passed; and though as long as the light lasted I kept a bright look-out for boats on the Sound or men passing on the Ross, no help came near me. It still rained, and I turned in to sleep, as wet as ever and with a cruel sore throat, but a little comforted, perhaps, by having said good-night to my next neighbours, the people of Iona.

"Charles the Second declared a man could stay out-doors more days in the year in the climate of England than in any other. This was very like a king with a palace at his back and changes of dry clothes. But he must have had better luck on his flight from Worcester than I had on that miserable isle. It was the height of summer; yet it rained for more than twenty-four hours, and did not clear until the afternoon of the third day."

From David's arrival on the islet to his meeting with Alan again just after the murder, the story is in a transi-

tional phase: it is in the process of moving from a simple adventure story like *Treasure Island* to an adventure story which utilizes certain topographical and historical emotions. Incidents—such as David's meeting with the two catechists—are introduced for the sake of filling in the picture from the point of view of history and topography rather than from that of a straightforward novel of action. And though we are prepared to some extent for this transition by the conversation between Alan and David in the round-house of the brig after the fight, it is none the less apparent as a transition, and the fact that the novel is in some degree changing its character at this point is clear to every careful reader.

From Chapter XVIII, where David and Alan are re-united, several new elements begin to emerge. David is no longer simply a normal boy "doing and suffering" in a pattern of action calculated to arouse interest and suspense in the reader. The reflective element which we saw as part of his character when he was alone in the islet now appears as an essential part of his make-up, so that the action, in the light of David's reactions to it, takes on a moral significance. This moral significance is introduced in a comparatively crude form at the opening of Chapter XVIII.

"Alan was the first to come round. He rose, went to the border of the wood, peered out a little, and then returned and sat down.

"'Well,' said he, 'yon was a hot burst, David.'

"I said nothing, nor so much as lifted my face. I had seen murder done, and a great ruddy, jovial gentleman struck out of life in a moment; the pity of that sight was still sore within me, and yet that was but a part of my concern. Here was murder done upon the man

ADVENTURE

Alan hated; here was Alan skulking in the trees and running from the troops; and whether his was the hand that fired or only the head that ordered, signified but little. By my way of it, my only friend in that wild country was blood-guilty in the first degree; I held him in horror; I could not look upon his face; I would have rather lain alone in the rain on my cold isle, than in that warm wood beside a murderer.

“Are ye still wearied?” he asked again.

“No,” said I, still with my face in the bracken; ‘no, I am not wearied now, and I can speak. You and me must twine,’ I said. ‘I liked you very well, Alan, but your ways are not mine, and they’re not God’s; and the short and the long of it is just that we must twine.’

“I will hardly twine from ye, David, without some kind of reason for the same,” said Alan mighty gravely. ‘If ye ken anything against my reputation, it’s the least thing that ye should do, for auld acquaintance sake, to let me hear the name of it; and if ye have only taken a distaste to my society, it will be proper for me to judge if I’m insulted.’

“Alan,” said I, ‘what is the sense of this? Ye ken very well yon Campbell-man lies in his blood upon the road.’

“He was silent for a little; then says he, ‘Did ever ye hear tell of the story of the Man and the Good People?’—by which he meant the fairies.”

The chapter entitled “The House of Fear,” describing the impact of Colin Roy Campbell’s murder on the family of James Stewart of the Glens—who was afterwards hanged for the crime he did not commit—introduces a sombre note quite different from anything in *Treasure Island* and from anything in the early part of *Kidnapped*. Structurally, the function of this episode is to provide David with a motive for his attempt to prove James Stewart’s innocence on his return to Edinburgh at the end of the book, an attempt which plays an important part in the opening chapters of *David Balfour*, the sequel

to *Kidnapped*. But the reader is struck by the fact that, for the purposes of the plot of *Kidnapped* considered as an adventure story, David's intention of proving James's innocence is wholly irrelevant, for it is something only hinted at at the very end of the novel, after the plot has been satisfactorily tied up; the reader also notices that the elaboration of the episode at the "house of fear" goes beyond what is necessary to establish the motive for David's later intervention at the murder trial. The incident is not "picturesque" as the incident at the House of Shaws is picturesque; its chief function seems to be rather to provide some moral and historical comment on the Highland situation of the period. The concluding remark of Alan is almost in the tone of one of the old tragic ballads: "The day comes unco soon in this month of July; and tomorrow there'll be a fine to-do in Appin, a fine riding of dragoons and crying of 'Cruachan!' and running of red-coats, and it behoves you and me to be the sooner gone."

The subsequent adventures of David and Alan are a series of separate incidents that follow each other without any structural necessity: from here until their arrival at the Forth the plot is episodic and the novel becomes in a sense picaresque. Yet the character of David develops, while that of Alan remains static. Reminiscence and moral feeling blend in David's mind with his reactions to present events:

"The tediousness and pain of these hours upon the rocks grew only the greater as the day went on, the rock getting still the hotter and the sun fiercer. There were giddiness, and sickness, and sharp pangs

ADVENTURE

like rheumatism, to be supported. I minded then, and have often minded since, on the lines in our Scotch Psalm:—

“The moon by night thee shall not smite,
Nor yet the sun by day;”

and indeed it was only by God’s blessing that we were neither of us sun-smitten.”

Interest is kept up by the introduction of more or less self-contained incidents such as the visit to Cluny Macpherson’s cage. The quarrel scene, however, is less episodic in nature than many of the others: it serves to revive the note of suspense when immediate danger is temporarily diminished, as well as to comment on the character of both protagonists. We see in this scene the first full emergence of the note of self-pity which is to sound so much more distinctly in *David Balfour*.

“At this the last of my anger oozed all out of me; and I found myself only sick, and sorry, and blank, and wondering at myself. I would have given the world to take back what I had said; but a word once spoken, who can recapture it? I minded me of all Alan’s kindness and courage in the past, how he had helped and cheered and borne with me in our evil days; and then recalled my own insults, and saw that I had lost forever that doughty friend. At the same time, the sickness that hung upon me seemed to redouble, and the pang in my side was like a sword for sharpness. I thought I must have swooned where I stood.

This it was that gave me a thought. No apology could blot out what I had said; it was needless to think of one, none could cover the offence; but where an apology was vain, a mere cry for help might bring Alan back to my side. I put my pride away from me. ‘Alan!’ I said; ‘if ye cannae help me, I must just die here.’

“He started up sitting, and looked at me.

“‘It’s true,’ said I. ‘I’m by with it. O, let me get into the bield of a house—I’ll die there easier.’ I had no need to pretend; whether I

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

chose or not, I spoke in a weeping voice that would have melted a heart of stone.

"'Can ye walk,' asked Alan.

"'No,' said I, 'not without help. This last hour, my legs have been fainting under me, I've a stitch in my side like a red-hot iron; I cannae breathe right. If I die, ye'll can forgive me, Alan? In my heart, I liked ye fine—even when I was the angriest.'

"'Wheesht, wheesht!' cried Alan. 'Dinnae say that! David, man, ye ken—' He shut his mouth upon a sob. 'Let me get my arm about ye,' he continued, 'that's the way! Now lean upon me hard. Gude kens where there's a house! We're in Balwhidder, too, there should be no want of houses, no, nor friends' houses here. Do you gang easier so, Davie?'

"'Aye,' said I, 'I can be doing this way'; and I pressed his arm with my hand.

"Again he came near sobbing. 'Davie,' said he, 'I'm no a right man at all; I have neither sense nor kindness, I couldnae remember ye were just a bairn, I couldnae see ye were dying on your feet; Davie, ye'll have to try and forgive me.'

"'O, man, let's say no more about it!' said I. 'We're neither one of us to mend the other—that's the truth! We must just bear and forbear, man Alan! O, but my stitch is sore! Is there nae house?'

The tone of the narrative at this point leaves no doubt that Stevenson is identifying himself with David Balfour to an extent he had not done with Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island*. David Balfour—whose very name was taken from Stevenson's maternal ancestry—is the author's projection of himself into a carefully chosen past. Youthful memories and experiences are put into a historical context, surrounded with an emotion appropriate to that historical context, and set in a pattern of picturesque adventure: the result is a novel that is partly historical, partly topographical, partly autobiographical, and partly a straight adventure story. No wonder Stevenson found

ADVENTURE

some difficulty in handling *Kidnapped* in its later stages.

A novel of this kind is bound to affect the reader according to which aspect of it has most importance for him. The purely historical element will have little interest for the reader who, unacquainted with Scottish history of the period, is reading the book simply as an adventure story. For such a reader parts of the book will be tedious: the present writer, who has discussed *Kidnapped* with graduate classes at an American university, found that most of the students criticized the novel on the grounds that there were too many historical and topographical digressions. But once these readers were given the opportunity of reading some background material, including some of Stevenson's sources, they saw *Kidnapped* in a new light and read it as a different—and much more absorbing—book. A general introduction to the 1745 rebellion and its aftermath, and some discussion of the various theories encountered by Stevenson concerning the real murder of Colin Campbell, added considerably to the novel's depth. That Stevenson was not acquainted with all the Highland traditions concerning the death of the Red Fox—and it was not surprising, for they were kept a close secret—and wrongly assumed the killer to have been "a Cameron from Mamore" is of course irrelevant. The point is that he saw the murder as part of the context of Highland affairs of the period, and if the reader does not see it that way but sees it only as the motive for Alan's and David's flight, he will not read the book that Stevenson wrote.

It is of course a fault in an author if he is unable to make his work sufficiently self-contained so that any alert and

intelligent reader will be able to read it adequately; and in a sense it is true that *Kidnapped* falls between several stools. Yet if the reader will take the trouble to put himself in some slight degree into the frame of mind of the author—that is, if he will provide himself with sufficient background information to enable him to find some satisfaction in the historical and topographical elements in the novel—he will find the various strands in the book coming together in a new and fascinating way.

We have noted the complex origin of the novel in Stevenson's historical and autobiographical interests. It would be wrong, however, to over-emphasize the multiple nature of *Kidnapped*; for Stevenson was craftsman enough to provide the book with sufficient anticipation and foreshadowing in the early chapters (such as the notable example of David's seeing the marching soldiers on his first visit to Edinburgh and being innocently, yet, in the light of subsequent events, ominously, thrilled) to send the virgin reader through even the comparatively dull passages with determination. And when David and Alan reach the Forth after their wanderings, and the thread of the dispossessed heir story is taken up again, enriched by now with a host of other implications, the story, far from petering to a close, takes on new life. The episode of the trapping of Ebenezer is one of the most effective in the book.

And this set a new problem for Stevenson. The story had in a sense come to an end; Alan, the co-hero, had rounded off his adventures; yet for David Balfour, the other and originally the only hero, it was but beginning. The ending of *Kidnapped* is not the ending originally

ADVENTURE

planned for the book; for Stevenson had intended to make the Highland wanderings a mere episode in the course of David's adventures. Yet his interest in Scotland and in Scottish affairs of the period had seduced him into writing another sort of book. The only way out of the problem was to end the Highland story—the story of David and Alan—at this point, but to leave David himself *in medias res* with the promise of a sequel.

The key to an understanding of the problem into which Stevenson landed himself in *Kidnapped* lies in his interest in Scotland and in his own boyhood. That interest grew as Stevenson grew older, until his final problem as an artist became that of finding a kind of writing in which he could combine his own youthful sense of romance, his by now passionate feeling for the Scottish countryside, and his strong sense of Scottish history, in a unified and mature novel. *Weir of Hermiston*, Stevenson's final and unfinished novel, thus represents not only the discovery by Stevenson of a form of fiction calculated to do most justice to his genius; it represents also the solution to a series of problems first posed, indirectly, by the structure of *Kidnapped*.

3. TRANSITION

I

THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE WAS COMPLETED AND PUBLISHED in 1888, and marks a significant transition in Stevenson's career as a novelist. The novel itself, like so many of Stevenson's, falls between two stools, for, while it sets out to be a more sombre and more subtle interpretation of human events than the "pure" adventure story allows, it ends up simply as an exaggerated adventure story with all the conventional trimmings and tricks of the trade. That there was a failure of inspiration here—or, rather, the reluctant utilization of an inappropriate inspiration—Stevenson himself admitted, and every critic who has discussed *The Master of Ballantrae* has recognised that the work is broken-backed. Nevertheless, it is an important and striking novel, not only important as indicating clearly the road on which Stevenson was to set out in that all too brief last period, but, for all its defects of structure, an impressive work in its own right. The note of brooding tragedy, effectively related to the topographical and his-

TRANSITION

torical atmosphere, is a more striking achievement than the more brittle note of *Kidnapped*: the texture of *The Master of Ballantrae*, at least in the first part, is subtler and more closely woven, and though the point of view keeps shifting in a somewhat disconcerting manner as first one narrator and then another takes up the tale, we feel for the first time in the early part of this novel that an adult insight is being consistently presented in an adult manner. History is here utilized not simply as a source of romantic incident or a method of making topography interesting, but as an unobtrusive background to an interesting psychological situation, and that situation itself shows Stevenson at last facing the problem of evil with a man's mind rather than a boy's.

Stevenson was always conscious of the moral aspects of his work, even in those stories where he deliberately took a holiday from morality as normally understood and equated evil simply with the picturesque. In *Prince Otto* he had dealt more deliberately with a moral problem, but in that book there was a careful attempt to be "precious" and oblique, with the result that it reads like the work of a clever boy rather than a mature man. In *The Master of Ballantrae* he creates a situation more complex and less adolescent in its moral implications, and, further, the moral aspects of the action do not represent a thesis independently conceived, but are an integral part of the meaning of the novel as it progresses. The process of integrating his separate insights, which was to go on all through Stevenson's life, has here reached a new and important stage. Life in *The Master of Ballantrae* is a richer and sadder phenomenon than in any of his earlier works.

True, the novel eventually falls apart into a series of preposterous "contrived" episodes—but not before the reader has got a glimpse of the Stevenson who was to write *Weir of Hermiston*.

Stevenson as a novelist never lost one important quality: even when the reader is aware of defects in structure and presentation his interest is always held and he is never tempted to lay the book aside in weariness or annoyance. *The Master of Ballantrae* is "readable" throughout; the pity is that in the latter part it is readable on a so much lower level than the first part. In the opening chapters, particularly in those related by Mr. Mackellar (who ought, of course, to have told the whole story), the sombre landscape of the South-West of Scotland illuminates and is illuminated by the brooding sense of doom which hangs over the human situation presented. This is the note of the Border ballads: Stevenson has somehow managed to infuse something of the bleaker side of that impressive Scots folk tradition into the novel. There are sections of Scott's *Redgauntlet* that are set in the same part of the country and strike a similar note, but the note is not one that is often heard in Scottish fiction. If Stevenson had not sent the Master of Ballantrae to India and involved him with that preposterous puppet, Secundra Das; if he had allowed the novel to move swiftly and firmly to the necessary tragic conclusion instead of complicating the issue by the most improbable trick devices (improbable in terms of the plot as initially laid down, as well as in the more literal sense) *The Master of Ballantrae* would have been Stevenson's first and only successful tragic novel. But something made him shy away

TRANSITION

from this concession to the tragic implications of his own imagination: he seems to have been driven by some unconscious urge so to interfere with the story before the tragedy could be completed that the conclusion, when arrived at, would appear to the reader to be less the consummation of a tragedy than the culmination of an adventure.

The Master of Ballantrae suffered from being written in instalments for serial publication. Much of it was written at Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks in 1887-8: it was continued at sea on the yacht "Casco" and finished at Honolulu. In a letter to Sidney Colvin written from Saranac Lake in December 1887 Stevenson gives his first account of his plan for the novel:

I have fallen head over heels into a new tale, *The Master of Ballantrae*. . . . It is to me a most seizing tale: there are some fantastic elements; the most is a dead genuine human problem—human tragedy, I should say rather. It will be about as long, I imagine, as *Kidnapped*. [Here he gives a list of the characters] . . . I have done most of the big work, the quarrel, duel between the brothers, and announcement of the death to Clementina and my Lord [Clementina became Alison in the finished novel]—Clementina, Henry, and Mackellar (nicknamed Squaretoes) are really very fine fellows; the Master is all I know of the devil. I have known hints of him, in the world, but always cowards; he is as bold as a lion, but with the same deadly, causeless duplicity I have watched with so much surprise in my two cowards. 'Tis true, I saw a hint of the same nature in another man who was not a coward; but he had other things to attend to; the Master has nothing else but his devilry."

It will be seen that even at this stage Stevenson was aware of the two conflicting elements in the novel—the "fantastic elements" and the "genuine human problem."

Some months later he wrote of *The Master of Ballantrae* to Henry James that "five parts of it are sound, human tragedy; the last one or two, I regret to say, not so soundly designed; I almost hesitated to write them; they are very picturesque, but they are fantastic; they shame, perhaps degrade, the beginning. I wish I knew; that was how the tale came to me, however." He goes on to summarize the plot:

"The older brother goes out in the '45, the younger stays; the younger, of course, gets title and estate and marries the bride designate of the elder—a family match, but he (the younger) had always loved her, and she had really loved the elder. Do you see the situation? Then the devil and Saranac suggested this *dénouement*, and I joined the two ends in a day or two of constant feverish thought, and began to write. And now—I wonder if I have not gone too far with the fantastic. The elder brother is an INCUBUS: supposed to be killed at Culloden, he turns up again and bleeds the family of money; on that stopping he comes and lives with them, whence flows the real tragedy, the nocturnal duel of the brothers (very naturally, and indeed, I think, inevitably arising), and second supposed death of the elder. Husband and wife now really make up, and then the cloven hoof appears. For the third supposed death and the manner of the third reappearance is steep, steep, sir. It is even very steep, and I fear it shames the honest stuff so far; but then it is highly pictorial, and it leads up to the death of the elder brother at the hands of the younger in a perfectly cold-blooded murder, of which I wish (and mean) the reader to approve. You see how daring is the design. There are really but six characters, and one of these episodic, and yet it covers eighteen years, and will be, I imagine, the longest of my works."

Stevenson was nearly always his own best critic, and no one has commented on the defects of *The Master of Ballantrae* more precisely or more severely than its author.

TRANSITION

Yet he was aware, too, that, as he wrote to Colvin in January 1889, "*The Master of Ballantrae* contains more human work than anything of mine since *Kidnapped*"—the modern reader will be inclined to omit the exception and agree that it contains more "human work" than anything he had yet written. The ending of the novel never ceased to worry him, and though he defended it against Henley's charge of being "grimy"—it was grim, not grimy, Stevenson maintained—he kept on referring uneasily to "that damned ending."

It seems clear that the reason why Stevenson allowed himself to give this unsatisfactory twist to the story was that from the beginning he was unable to integrate fully in his mind the whole imaginative conception and its implications. He had the "feel" of the story, the essential atmosphere and the essential tragedy, but could see no way of projecting the plot to an adequate conclusion without introducing properties that belonged to a different kind of story altogether, the kind of romantic adventure story about which he had been so enthusiastic in earlier days. *The Master of Ballantrae* is thus one more piece of evidence that Stevenson throughout his career as a novelist was moving towards the fullest integration of a variety of insights and ambitions, and that between *Treasure Island*, his first "pure" adventure story, and *Weir of Hermiston*, his final unfinished masterpiece, his novels are a series of attempts at integration on different levels, a series of transitions from the adventure story to a much more profound form of fiction.

We can thus get some additional insight into *The Master of Ballantrae* by looking at it as part of Stevenson's total

achievement in fiction; yet this should not prevent us from assessing the novel as a unit in itself. And the fact remains that in spite of the manifest faults of the book, which have been so often pointed at, *The Master of Ballantrae* is a powerful, sombre and impressive tragedy of a kind quite unlike anything Stevenson had yet written. So successful is Stevenson in conveying the appropriate atmosphere in the earlier part of the book, that its shadow falls over the preposterous contrivances of the latter part and prevents them from appearing as ridiculous as they really are. If he had kept the narrative in the mouth of Ephraim Mackellar he might have been even more successful in achieving this result, for Mackellar's character and approach are themselves perfect symbols of the kind of mood he was trying to create. Mackellar is indeed the best drawn character in the book, and his employment as narrator of the greater part of the story is a stroke of genius. Without Mackellar *The Master of Ballantrae*, even though there were no change in the plot, would lose the greater part of its effectiveness.

It was a new departure for Stevenson to make the narrator of a story an unheroic figure whose interest in the events which constitute the plot is that of a loyal and humble retainer. In contrast with the even tenor of Mackellar's narrative and his homespun Scots temperament, the brilliance of the Master and the grim patience of his younger brother both emerge more clearly. Mackellar's selfless but somewhat dour devotion is in itself an almost tragic phenomenon, for he is a man without any independent personal life of his own, educated, but without professional ambition, loyal, but without a family of

TRANSITION

his own to benefit by his loyalty. He is the type of the educated man without land or influence in an age when land and influence counts for everything. He sinks his identity in the service of Henry Durie, and by doing so secures for himself a character that is neither heroic nor pathetic but has something of both qualities and something of tragedy. By his inflexible concentration on his master he is able to serve as an effective guide and narrator to the reader, looking and pointing and describing with a sad earnestness which sets the tone for the novel as a whole. His stolid Lowland integrity makes him the perfect foil for the brilliant "devilry" of the Master, whose relations with Mackellar provide an illuminating commentary on the Master's relations with his brother—a commentary without which the story would lose much of its power. The Master himself is one of the most effective studies of the hero as villain that English literature has produced (and English literature has produced many). His combination of attractiveness and evil is nowhere so well illustrated as in the progress of Mackellar's attitude towards him. When Mackellar himself succumbs temporarily to the Master's charm, at the very moment when his realization of the Master's evil nature is fullest, the portrait of both characters is complete. The Master is Long John Silver given psychological reality and subtlety—the attractive bad man—and Mackellar is Scott's Caleb Balderstone translated from a picturesque caricature to an impressive and moving personality.

Different as *The Master of Ballantrae* is, one can nevertheless see in it clearly the author of *Weir of Hermiston*. The introduction of the Border ballad atmosphere in the

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

second paragraph is a mild foretaste of the great fifth chapter of the later novel: the vein is not exploited so fully, nor is it placed in such an impressive human context; but one can see from the earlier passage the way in which Stevenson's imagination was beginning to work. It shows the same mood in which he replied to S. R. Crockett's dedication, writing of Scotland from Vailima:

Blows the wind today, and the sun and the rain are flying,
Blows the wind on the moors today and now,
Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying,
My heart remembers how!

Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places,
Standing stones on the vacant wine-red moor,
Hills of sheep, and the homes of the silent vanished races,
And winds, austere and pure. . . .

The bright, picturesque image—the highwayman rappeting on the shutters, the sailor signalling from the shore to the waiting ship, the horseman galloping off into the night—has been succeeded by the more sombre vision, and against this vision (so essentially Lowland Scots) is set the tragic play of human passion. *Kidnapped*, with its long excursions into topography, its bleak descriptions of Erraid and Rannoch Moor serving as backdrop to the bright actions of historical figures, looked back to *Treasure Island* yet at the same time looked forward to *The Master of Ballantrae* and *Weir of Hermiston*. Stevenson's romantic ideal has suffered a significant sea-change.

It is true that melodrama breaks out occasionally even in the early part of *The Master of Ballantrae*—the duel followed by the mysterious disappearance of the Master's

TRANSITION

supposedly dead body is the most obvious example—and some of the incidents are of an extravagance that perhaps does violence to the essential atmosphere of the story. But a careful perusal of the novel will convince the reader that some degree of startling action is essential if the story is not to fall into a brooding jog-trot: it is precisely this contrast between the violent incidents and the long periods of suspense and waiting that provides the momentum of the work. The melodrama has its place in the construction of *The Master of Ballantrae*: it is the mechanical trickery in the latter part, not its melodrama, that weakens the novel. Melodrama has never been the antithesis of mature art, least of all of tragedy (as Shakespeare conclusively proved); everything depends on the context out of which it arises and the human situation of which it is a part.

The calm evenness of style throughout *The Master of Ballantrae* losses its effect somewhat when the narrative is put into the mouth of Burke, for that Burke and Mackellar should have such a similar style of writing is a coincidence too great to be convincing. Stevenson seems to have made but a perfunctory effort to fit the style of the narratives of Burke and of the trader Mountain to their respective characters: Mackellar remains the dominant factor in determining the style of the novel throughout. This is perhaps necessary, for it is precisely the contrast between Mackellar's even narrative and the grim and dramatic implications of the events narrated that gives the book its essential flavor; in the circumstances, therefore, it is difficult to see what Stevenson hoped to gain by splitting up the story among different narrators. It

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

would have been more effective, too, if the narrative had remained focussed on Durisdeer and the Master's adventures were made known only through the manner in which he turned up at intervals at his ancestral home.

But the true quality of the novel lies in the effective presentation of the characters of the two brothers and Mackellar in their relation to the action and to the background. The Master is Stevenson's most mature attempt, up to this point, at a serious presentation of a moral and psychological problem through a character portrait; his brother is equally successful, and the account of the change in his character after the Master's second absence with the subsequent total deterioration, is more effective as a character study in its own right than as a structural part of the plot—an unprecedented situation in Stevenson's novels. The character of Mackellar, as we have seen, is essential to the adequate presentation of the story: it is he who sets the dominating mood throughout.

With all its faults, *The Master of Ballantrae* is thus an impressive novel and an important key to an understanding of Stevenson's development as a novelist. It is a book, too, in which the author suppresses his own character to an extent he had never yet done in his work. It is the least egotistical of his novels; he does not hesitate to make the narrator at times both timid and ridiculous. In spite of the preposterous contrivances associated with the appearance of Secundra Das, the novel has a quiet objectivity in the telling which indicates that Stevenson had moved far from his earlier habit of constructing novels by setting himself in ideal situations or by finding an "objective correlative" for the picturesque fancies of

TRANSITION

his youth. He is coming to closer grips with a more essentially dramatic mode of fiction, and sublimating his egotism—the egotism that all writers possess—in a more aesthetically rewarding manner.

2

David Balfour * was written in 1892, many years after Stevenson had completed *Kidnapped*. By this time he was settled in Samoa, and his perspective on Scotland was changing. It was thus in many ways a different Stevenson who returned some seven years later to write a sequel to the book which had been wound up in the middle—partly for reasons of health, it is true, but more fundamentally, as we have seen, because the design of the book changed as he wrote, determining him to finish at a point originally intended to be the middle.

A key to the mood in which at least the first part of *David Balfour* was written is found in the dedication to his lifelong Edinburgh friend, Charles Baxter:

“ . . . There should be left in our native city some seed of the elect; some long-legged, hot-heated youth must repeat to-day our dreams and wanderings of so many years ago; he will relish the pleasure, which should have been ours, to follow among named streets and numbered houses the country walks of David Balfour, to identify Dean, and Silvermills, and Broughton, and Hope Park and Pilrig, and poor old Lochend—if it still be standing, and the Figgate Whins—if there be any of them left; or to push (on a long holiday)

* *David Balfour* was the original title. The book was called *Catrina* in the British edition to prevent confusion with *Kidnapped*. It is still known as *Catrina* in Britain and as *David Balfour* in America.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

so far afield as Gillane or the Bass. So, perhaps, his eye shall be opened to behold the series of the generations, and he shall weigh with surprise his momentous and nugatory gift of life.

"You are still—as when first I saw, as when I last addressed you—in the venerable city which I must always think of as my home. And I have come so far; and the sights and thoughts of my youth pursue me; and I see like a vision the youth of my father, and of his father, and the whole stream of lives flowing down there, far in the north, with the sound of laughter and tears, to cast me out in the end, as by a sudden freshet, on these ultimate islands. And I admire and bow my head before the romance of destiny."

In describing David's adventures in Edinburgh Stevenson is finding "a local habitation and a name" for many of his youthful memories and ancestral traditions; setting memory, nostalgia and history into a framework of fiction, he unconsciously gives the book a much stronger personal note than can be found in *Kidnapped*, where, though the same three elements exist, they are treated much more objectively. Not only is David a more active hero throughout the book than the hero of any other of Stevenson's adventure stories, the master of his own destiny rather than someone acted upon, but the first person, in which the story (like so many of his others) is told, takes on a note at times confessional, more often of self-projection and wish fulfilment, that one does not find elsewhere. Stevenson was looking back on Scotland from Vailima, and the sense of his own early life and a strong feeling for the picturesque aspects of the history and geography of the country he had left behind him merged into a much simpler and stronger sense of personal projection than had operated in *Kidnapped*. In bringing David into contact with the Lord Advocate Grant of

TRANSITION

Prestongrange and other historical figures, in emphasizing his heroism in doing all he can to save the innocent James Stewart while at the same time dwelling on his hopes and fears and hesitations with a curious warmth and affection, in lingering over moments which find his hero in an interesting emotional situation without forwarding the plot, Stevenson has moved further from the pattern of the adventure as originally laid down in *Treasure Island* than he did in *Kidnapped*. Like *Kidnapped*, it is in many ways a patchy book, considered as a series of adventures with a happy ending; yet the hero dominates it to a greater extent than in *Kidnapped* and in spite of incidental set pieces like the concluding scene with James More and Alan the book has a psychological unity that *Kidnapped* lacks.

David Balfour falls clearly into two parts. The first is the record of David's unsuccessful attempt to give his evidence at the trial of the unfortunate James, in the course of which he comes into contact with Prestongrange and his daughter, and with Catriona. The second part is set mostly in Holland, after James's trial had ended, and concerns the adventures of David and Catriona in their unusual relationship. The change in tone and interest between these two parts is unmistakable. The plot in the second half of the book turns simply on the emotional relationship between David and Catriona and the external circumstances which affect that relationship. The end is, of course, the marriage of the hero and heroine. In the first part the emotional life of David is at times subordinated to the simple narrative interest, and the plot here (for each part has its own distinct plot and its own climax,

though of course the plot of the first flows into the second, which arises out of certain of the circumstances of the first) is essentially one of intrigue.

All this sounds very muddled. And indeed the reader, though carried along to the end of the book in a steady line of interest, is apt to find himself muddled at a number of points. He finds new interests emerging and old ones fading as the story proceeds. In the first part of the story David sets himself a plan of action and endeavours to carry it out, and if he becomes involved in other people's affairs it is in the course of pursuing a purposive line of action of his own. Once in Holland, however, the hero drifts in accordance with circumstances prepared by others and the story no longer moves in a straight line but circles round slowly until the potentialities of a certain emotional situation are realised. And then, at the very end, the straight narrative line reappears to provide a final brief intrigue and a happy ending for hero and heroine.

The matter is further complicated by the ambiguous part played by the principal female characters. Miss Grant, in terms of the story as a whole a purely incidental figure, is portrayed with a liveliness and a vigor that puts Catriona quite in the shade. Catriona is an attractive but essentially a symbolic and sentimental figure, whereas Miss Grant, who plays such a minor part, is much more individualized. This unusual relationship between the heroine and an incidental female character helps to emphasize the split in the novel.

To explain this one must once again go behind the novel itself to the multitude of autobiographical impulses

TRANSITION

that were working in Stevenson when he wrote it. He was thinking of Edinburgh and his youth there, and the romantic dreams he had had. He must have thought with particularly strong emotion about the Highland girl with whom he fell in love as a young student and from whom he parted forever when his father put his foot down. He could not indulge in any full and honest retrospect in this matter. He was married to a strong-willed and possessive woman whose presence and influence did not encourage any free or direct introduction into his writing of those bohemian days in Edinburgh. Yet the signs that his mind was at this time turning more and more to the romantic memories of those days are abundant in his work. It was partly his exile, which led him to brood on Scotland and his youth there, and partly a sense of growing old and respectable. Yet his brooding was inhibited. He had long ago crumpled up "Claire" into a far corner of his mind, out of love for his parents and his wife and for other less ascertainable reasons. But she and all she stood for remained vividly in that corner, to emerge obliquely in certain of his writings. He could not trust himself to portray her completely; but he took aspects and symbols of her and used them when he could. Miss Grant and Catriona are two sides of that early love. In Miss Grant he drew the wit and liveliness that one can be fairly sure was an important part of "Claire's" character; in Catriona he drew the more purely feminine aspects, the tenderness, the dependence on male protection, the changing moods and passions. Catriona's loneliness and helplessness is surely a reflection of the lonely and helpless position of the pathetic Highland lass that

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Stevenson picked up on the Edinburgh streets and fell in love with. The ages of the youthful hero and heroine also fit the circumstances of Stevenson's early passion.

The comparative lack of reality of Catriona can be attributed to Stevenson's inability to speak frankly of his early love. The more masculine side of her character—the wit and vivacity and companionship—could be portrayed by Miss Grant; but Catriona represented the subtler feminine side, and here he could not speak freely. Catriona thus represents only one half of a split personality, and that one half portrayed under the limiting control of certain inhibitions. Under the circumstances, Stevenson did very well. For in portraying Catriona he did get across the essential appeal of a helpless yet passionate character, even though the portrait is symbolical rather than literal. There were circumstances that made it impossible for Stevenson to be literal in such a portrayal. He came near to it in the heroine of *Weir of Hermiston*, where he was at last able to harmonize perfectly his autobiographical and purely literary impulses.

This, of course, is but a theory; but it does fit the known facts of Stevenson's life and those that can be deduced from his writings, and it helps to explain certain features of *David Balfour* otherwise inexplicable. It accounts, too, for that note of self-pity that recurs in the book, self-pity so curiously disguised as stoicism: it is a note that, unknown to the author, stresses the autobiographical element in the book. (The autobiographical element is, of course, emotional not literal; there is no record of the external facts of Stevenson's life in any of his novels.) The following passage reminds us of the concluding episode

TRANSITION

of the quarrel scene in *Kidnapped*, but the implications are clearer:

"‘O, let me speak!’ said I. ‘I will speak but the once, and then leave you, if you will, for ever. I came this day in the hopes of a kind word that I am sore in want of. I know that what I said must hurt you, and I knew it then. It would have been easy to have spoken smooth, easy to lie to you; can you not think how I was tempted to the same? Cannot you see the truth of my heart shine out?’

“‘I think here is a great deal of work, Mr. Balfour,’ said she. ‘I think we will have met but the once, and will can part like gentle-folk.’

“‘O, let me have one to believe in me!’ I pleaded, ‘I cannae bear it else. The whole world is clanned against me. How am I to go through with my dreadful fate? If there’s none to believe in me I cannot do it. The man must just die, for I cannot do it.’

“She had still looked straight in front of her, head in air; but at my words or the tone of my voice she came to a stop. ‘What is this you say?’ she asked. ‘What are you talking of?’

“‘It is my testimony which may save an innocent life,’ said I, ‘and they will not suffer me to bear it. What would you do yourself? You know what this is, whose father lies in danger. Would you desert the poor soul? They have tried all ways with me. They have sought to bribe me, they offered me hills and valleys. And to-day that sleuth-hound told me how I stood, and to what a length he would go to butcher and disgrace me. I am to be brought in a party to the murder; I am to have held Glenure in talk for money and old clothes; I am to be killed and shamed. If this is the way I am to fall, and me scarce a man—if this is the story to be told of me in all Scotland—if you are to believe it too, and my name is to be nothing but a by-word—Catriona, how can I go through with it? The thing’s not possible; it’s more than a man has in his heart.’

“I poured my words out in a whirl, one upon the other; and when I stopped I found her gazing on me with a startled face.

“‘Glenure! It is the Appin murder,’ she said softly, but with a very deep surprise.

[David now tells her the whole story.]

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

"'Well,' she said, when I had finished, 'you are a hero, surely, and I never would have thought that same!'"

This note—that of the hero pretending to be the weakling—recurs many times in *David Balfour*. The note of self-pity mingles with the heroic, and the effect is to surround the scenes in which they occur with an atmosphere more charged with emotion than the story demands. Stevenson is remembering "the unforgotten," whom he had renounced years before in his student days at Edinburgh:

"He came, he went. Perchance you wept awhile
And then forgot.
Ah me! but he that left you with a smile
Forgets you not."

The blue-eyed Highland girl he commemorated in these lines was a very different kind of character from the wife he married:

"Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew,
Steel-true and blade-straight,
The great artificer
Made my mate."

This was Fanny, his wife. Kate, Claire, Catriona, Christina, the unforgotten love of his youth who reappears in shadowy embodiments in his poetry and fiction, was neither dusky nor golden-eyed. But in his memory she remained vivid, and as Stevenson grew older he showed his readers more of her. Her final and least inhibited portrait is Christina of *Weir of Hermiston*.

These comments are offered by way of explanation of

TRANSITION

various aspects of *David Balfour*, and not as criticism, for obviously critical appraisal must concern itself with the work as it is, not with reconstructions of what went on in the mind of the writer. Criticism discovers certain incongruities in the novel, and if the critic turns biographer for a brief while he will be able to suggest an explanation of why these incongruities should exist.

There is some evidence that Stevenson's imagination flagged occasionally both in *Kidnapped* and in *David Balfour*, and that he introduced episodes whose sole function was to keep the story going until he could clarify his own mind concerning his future course. "The Tale of Tod Lapraik" obviously fills a gap of this kind: it has less organic relation to the texture of the story as a whole than "Wandering Willie's Tale" in Scott's *Redgauntlet*, which inspired it. But the tale is an excellent example of its kind, and can stand beside Scott's without shame. Stevenson had always been attracted to the Scottish macabre, as "Thrawn Janet" and other of his short stories eloquently testify. "Tod Lapraik" might have done better in a book of tales that included these other short stories; he hardly sorts well with Catriona, and even Alan Breck was superstitious in another kind of way. But the tale passes the time well while its author prepares himself for a new and different turn in this complex and variously motived novel.

3

It would of course be a mistake to assume that Stevenson as a novelist moved forward to greater maturity in a straight line from *Treasure Island* to *The Master of Ballantrae* and thence to *David Balfour*. His progress was

not necessarily towards "better" novels (*Treasure Island* is a more perfect novel of its kind than *The Master of Ballantrae*), nor was it always in a straight line. He never lost his love of the picaresque adventure story and under the influence of his collaborating young stepson Lloyd Osbourne he ventured more than once into this form even in the last phase of his career. *The Wrecker*, written in collaboration with Osbourne, is an astounding piece of picaresque romance combined with a variety of other elements, a kind of grand, pulsing "omnium gatherum full of life and variety and excitement at a fairly simple level. Stevenson was always ready to succumb to the charm of an adventure, and though he learned to write more profoundly he never repudiated his earlier instincts or methods.

At the time of his death Stevenson was working, in the full tide of his finest inspiration, on *Weir of Hermiston*; but only six weeks before, he had laid aside the still unfinished *St. Ives*, a picaresque adventure story which seems at first sight to belong to an earlier phase of his career. We have, however, already noted that Stevenson never abandoned his interest in this type of story even when he was developing a more profound type of fiction: his tendency was rather to merge several strains, including that of romantic adventure, in a richer and subtler context than that in his earlier novels. Thus in *The Master of Ballantrae* a story of adventure and intrigue is enriched by a new psychological interest and in *Weir of Hermiston* the earlier elements of historical romance are introduced indirectly in the retrospective chapter describing the adventures of the brothers Elliott.

TRANSITION

St. Ives has not the psychological richness of *The Master of Ballantrae* nor the greatness of *Weir of Hermiston*, but it is something more than the straightforward adventure story that it appears to be at first sight. There is a great deal of material worked into the story that in an earlier phase of Stevenson's career could only have found—and did find—expression in descriptive essays. By the device of bringing an English-speaking Frenchman to Edinburgh, Stevenson was able to provide the reader with an objective picture of the city and its environs through the hero's natural reactions and to introduce without artificiality comments on the Scottish and English character of the kind that hitherto had appeared only in his essays. Stevenson started his career as a writer with a series of separate kinds of writing—the moral essay, the descriptive essay, the short story, the picaresque novel, and so on—which he intended to take up in turn. As he grew older he gradually found ways of combining the functions of more and more of these separate kinds of writing in a single kind—fiction. And though *St. Ives* is a throwback to an earlier type in that it is written frankly as a piece of picaresque entertainment, and is best read as such, it has a much richer context than, say, *Treasure Island* and is full of perceptions and sensibilities that are deliberately absent from the earlier novel. It is full, too, of Stevenson's nostalgic memories of Edinburgh—true, the Edinburgh described is of an earlier generation than the city Stevenson knew, but it is essentially the same city. Like Stevenson in his childhood, St. Ives sees the lamplighter hurrying along the darkening Edinburgh streets; like Stevenson, he roams the city's thoroughfares

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

at night and takes part in the bohemian adventures of students; and his lady love dwells in the very Swanston cottage in which Stevenson spent so many happy summers as a child. Stevenson is looking back to Scotland from Vailima: St. Ives, the Frenchman, the prisoner looking out on Edinburgh from the Castle, is a symbol of Stevenson looking back on the city from the South Seas.

Stevenson left *St. Ives* unfinished and unrevised. Much of it bears all the marks of having been hastily written. The plot is put together of a succession of coincidences and crises many of which strain the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief" to the utmost. Yet for all its carelessness and haste, for all the artificiality of some of the incidents, *St. Ives* has a richness of texture not to be found in Stevenson's earlier stories. It has, too, a breeziness and a vigour which sweep the reader irresistibly forward.

Except for the hero himself and certain minor character types like Sim and Candlish, the characters in *St. Ives* are conventional and theatrical. The hero's cousin Alain is a mixture of Rashleigh Osbaldestone of Scott's *Rob Roy*—Stevenson draws on Scott to a greater extent than critics have observed—and his own Master of Ballantrae, without the latter's subtlety. He is a figure in a melodrama. Flora is little better than the most conventional of Scott's heroines—she is a symbol rather than a living character. The very name, so far removed from the homely Scots names he uses for those of his heroines that he drew in some degree from his own experience, indicates that she is an ideal and not a real figure.

TRANSITION

But the hero is Stevenson—Stevenson as he remembered his younger self, looking back in the last years of his life, Stevenson as he would have liked to be in his bohemian Edinburgh days. He is made French to symbolize his difference from the normal Edinburgh citizen and his early relations with France; he enters the novel as a prisoner to symbolize the prison of convention and family affection which bound him hand and foot in his youth. Only the escape from prison is pure wish-fulfilment: Stevenson did not escape in the straightforward romantic manner in which St. Ives escaped from Edinburgh Castle, nor did he win the girl who was in part the cause of his escape. The real Stevenson escaped only by renouncing the girl and by involving himself in much more complicated physical and psychological processes than those St. Ives was called upon to undergo.

St. Ives, then, represents another of those attempts to recapture and reinterpret his youth with which so much of Stevenson's work is directly or indirectly concerned, another of those efforts to incorporate into a novel selections from the memories, associations and emotions of his youth in Scotland. The more one investigates Stevenson's work the more one is driven to the realization that *A Child's Garden of Verses* is not a unique phenomenon among Stevenson's literary work; it is unique in form but not in purpose. Old Leerie, the lamplighter of the *Child's Garden*, reappears in *St. Ives*. On closer examination it will be seen that nearly all the characters and incidents of these poems recur in one form or another in the novels, particularly the later novels. Like Proust, Stevenson was

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

engaged in the "*récherche du temps perdu*," though no two writers could have attempted the task in more different ways.

St. Ives was finished in a competent though perhaps not a brilliant manner by Sir Arthur (then Mr.) Quiller-Couch. If anyone doubts Stevenson's mastery of the dramatic incident and his ability to make even a conventional figure from melodrama behave in an arresting and convincing manner, let him compare Quiller-Couch's rendering of the scene at the Assembly Ball with Stevenson's treatment of similar scenes; let him note how all the characters lose something of their flexibility in Quiller-Couch's hands and become more fixed and simple. Nevertheless Quiller-Couch did succeed in preserving the essential spirit of Stevenson's story in so far as it is a picaresque adventure story involving a variety of type characters with a love interest and the usual happy ending. But *St. Ives* was intended to be something else, too, and Quiller-Couch was quite naturally unable to breathe into his portion of the novel that subtle spirit of reminiscence and meditation which plays a part even in such a lively tale of action as this.

4. FULFILMENT

1

THOUGH STEVENSON, IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS USUAL CUSTOM, was working on more than one book during the last few months of his life, leaving both *St. Ives* and *Weir of Hermiston* unfinished, it is on the latter book that he was solely engaged during the weeks that preceded his death. He worked in a fever of inspiration that only the sudden fatal seizure cut short. The idea of the story had been maturing in his mind for some time, and by November 1892 he was already talking about it to correspondents. "It is a singular thing," he wrote to J. M. Barrie on November 1st, "that I should live here in the South Seas under conditions so new and so striking, and yet my imagination so continually inhabits that cold old huddle of grey hills from which we come. I have just finished *David Balfour*; I have another book on the stocks, *The Young Chevalier*, which is to be part in France and part in Scotland, and to deal with Prince Charlie about the year 1749; and now what have I done but begun a third

which is to be all moorland together, and is to have for a centerpiece a figure that I think you will appreciate—that of the immortal Braxfield—Braxfield himself is my *grand premier*, or since you are so much involved in the British drama, let me say my heavy lead."

The title of the book was at first to have been *The Justice-Clerk*. Lord Braxfield, the original of Weir of Hermiston, was a character who had long haunted Stevenson, who had been familiar from his youth with Braxfield's reputation and the traditions associated with his name. Many years before, in the essay on "Some Portraits by Raeburn" in *Virginibus Puerisque*, he had written of Raeburn's portrait of the Lord Justice-Clerk:

"Another portrait which irresistibly attracted the eye, was the half-length of Robert M'Queen, of Braxfield, Lord Justice-Clerk. If I know gusto in painting when I see it, this canvas was painted with rare enjoyment. The tart, rosy, humorous look of the man, his nose like a cudgel, his face resting squarely on the jowl, has been caught and perpetuated with something that looks like brotherly love. A peculiarly subtle expression haunts the lower part, sensual and incredulous, like that of a man tasting good Bordeaux with half a fancy it has been somewhat too long uncorked. From under the pendulous eyelids of old age, the eyes look out with a half-youthful, half-frosty twinkle. Hands, with no pretence to distinction, are folded on the judge's stomach. So sympathetically is the character conceived by the portrait painter, that it is hardly possible to avoid some movement of sympathy on the part of the spectator. And sympathy is a thing to be encouraged, apart from humane considerations, because it supplies us with materials for wisdom. It is probably more instructive to entertain a sneaking kindness for any unpopular person, and, among the rest, for Lord Braxfield, than to give way to perfect raptures of moral indignation against his abstract vices. He was the last judge on the Scotch bench to employ the pure Scotch idiom. His

FULFILMENT

opinions, thus given in Doric, and conceived in a lively, rugged, conversational style, were full of point and authority. Out of the bar, or off the bench, he was a convivial man, a lover of wine, and one who 'shone peculiarly' at tavern meetings. He has left behind him an unrivalled reputation for rough and cruel speech; and to this day his name smacks of the gallows. It was he who presided at the trials of Muir and Skirving in 1793 and 1794; and his appearance on these occasions was scarcely cut to the pattern of to-day. His summing up on Muir began thus—the reader must supply for himself 'the growling, blacksmith's voice' and the broad Scotch accent: 'Now this is the question for consideration—Is the panel guilty of sedition, or is he not? Now, before this can be answered, two things must be attended to that require no proof: *First*, that the British constitution is the best that ever was since the creation of the world, and, it is not possible to make it better.' It's a pretty fair start, is it not, for a political trial? A little later, he has occasion to refer to the relations of Muir with 'those wretches' the French. 'I never liked the French all my days,' said his lordship, 'but now I hate them.' And yet a little further on: 'A government in any country should be like a corporation; and in this country it is made up of the landed interest, which alone has the right to be represented. As for the rabble who have nothing but personal property, what hold has the nation of them? They may pack up their property on their backs, and leave the country in the twinkling of an eye.' After having made profession of sentiments so cynically anti-popular as these, when the trials were at an end, which was generally about midnight, Braxfield would walk home to his house in George Square with no better escort than an easy conscience. I think I see him getting his cloak about his shoulders, and, with perhaps a lantern in one hand, steering his way along the streets in the mirk January night. It might have been that very day that Skirving had defied him in these words: 'It is altogether unavailing for your lordship to menace me; for I have long learned to fear not the face of man;' and I can fancy, as Braxfield reflected on the number of what he called *Grumbletonians* in Edinburgh, and of how many of them must bear special malice against so upright and inflexible a judge, nay, and might at that very moment be lurking in the mouth of a dark close with hostile intent—I can fancy that he in-

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

dulged in a sour smile, as he reflected that he also was not especially afraid of men's faces or men's fists, and had hitherto found no occasion to embody this insensibility in heroic words. For if he were an inhumane old gentleman (and I am afraid that it is a fact that he was inhumane), he was also perfectly intrepid. You may look into the queer face of that portrait for as long as you will, but you will not see any hole or corner for timidity to enter in."

One can see in this vigorous passage the germ of much that is to be found in those sections of *Weir of Hermiston* that deal with Lord Weir.

Robert Macqueen, who assumed the title of Lord Braxfield on taking his seat as an ordinary lord of session in 1776, was notorious even in his own day as typifying the coarseness and brutal speech that were all too common among the Scottish criminal judges of the period. The anonymous *Letter to Robert Macqueen, Lord Braxfield, on his promotion to be one of the judges of the High Court of Justiciary* (Edinburgh, 1780) provides a contemporary account of these characteristics of Scottish judges, and Lord Cockburn's famous *Memorials of His Time* gives a classic portrait of "the Jeffreys of Scotland" which was familiar to Stevenson.* Braxfield's most notorious behaviour occurred when, as Lord Justice-Clerk, a position to which he was promoted in 1788, he presided at the trials of a group of moderate reformers charged with sedition at the height of the savage reaction which developments in France aroused among the governing classes in Britain. The court proceedings were

Cockburn's portrait of Braxfield is now held to be exaggerated. See the *Memorials* edited by L. Forbes Gray, Edinburgh, 1946, p. 81, footnote 2.

FULFILMENT

characterized by an exultant coarseness of speech on the part of the presiding judge and by sentences of ferocious severity. Braxfield, as Cockburn describes him in the passage to which Stevenson is referring in his essay on the Raeburn portrait, was "strong built and dark, with rough eyebrows, powerful eyes, threatening lips, and a low growling voice . . . like a formidable blacksmith. His accent and dialect were exaggerated Scotch; his language, like his thoughts, short, strong, and conclusive. Illiterate and without any taste for any refined enjoyment, strength of understanding, which gave him power without cultivation, only encouraged him to a more contemptuous disdain of all natures less coarse than his own. It may be doubted if he was ever so much in his element as when tauntingly repelling the last despairing claim of a wretched culprit, and sending him to Botany Bay or the gallows with an insulting jest. This union of talent, with a passion for rude domination, exercised in a very discretionary court, tended to create a formidable and dangerous judicial character." As Sir Sidney Colvin pointed out, Stevenson's story is set in 1814, fourteen years after Braxfield's death, by which time the manners of Scottish judges and of Scots folk in general had altered considerably. Colvin quotes Lockhart, writing about 1817: "Since the death of Lord Justice-Clerk Macqueen of Braxfield, the whole exterior of judicial deportment has been quite altered," and adds: "A similar criticism may probably hold good on the picture of border life contained in the chapter concerning the Four Black Brothers of Cauldstaneslap, namely, that it rather suggests the ways of an earlier generation; nor have I any clew to the

reasons which led Stevenson to choose this particular date, in the year preceding Waterloo, for a story which, in regard to some features at least, might seem more naturally placed some twenty-five or thirty years before."

The clew for which Sir Sidney looked in vain lay in Stevenson's desire to find a context in space and time which linked the Scotland familiar to him in boyhood with the romantic Border associations that led back to an earlier period of history. It is of the utmost importance for Stevenson in writing the story that while certain aspects of it derive from his own experiences in Swanston, Glencorse, and elsewhere, on the Pentlands and Lammermuirs, there should lie behind these the whole tragic sense of Scottish Border life that found such noble expression in the Ballads. By altering his chronology a little he was able to put his sense of Scottish history at the service of his sense of autobiography, and this welding of past and present made possible the rich and tragic texture which makes *Weir of Hermiston* the impressive fragment that it is.

The mood in which much of *Weir of Hermiston* was written can be seen from a passage in a letter Stevenson wrote to S. R. Crockett on May 17, 1893: "I shall never take that walk by the Fisher's Tryst and Glencorse. I shall never see Auld Reekie. I shall never set my foot again upon the heather. Here I am until I die, and here will I be buried. The word is out and the doom written." In the same letter he mentions *Weir of Hermiston* and *The Ebb-Tide*, which he was writing jointly with Lloyd Osbourne. "*Weir of Hermiston* is a much greater undertaking, and the plot is not good, I fear; but Lord Justice

FULFILMENT

Clerk Hermiston ought to be a plum." His imagination was working on memories of the Pentland Hills and the character of Lord Braxfield.

"I shall never take that walk by the Fisher's Tryst and Glencorse." He took it again, in imagination, in the composite landscape that he created out of his own memories as the setting for Hermiston. The Pentlands and the Lammermuirs both provide details for the scenery of *Weir of Hermiston*:

"I saw rain falling and the rainbow drawn
On Lammermuir. Hearkening I heard again
In my precipitous city beaten bells
Winnow the keen sea wind. And here afar,
Intent on my own race and place, I wrote."

In this dedication to his wife he lists some of the memories that contributed to the writing of the book—the Lowland Hills, and his own native "precipitous city" of Edinburgh. That he should dedicate *Weir of Hermiston* to his wife seems to indicate that the book was to be, among other things, an attempt to convey to her something of those ideas and emotions that sprang from his life in Scotland before he had ever met her, a part of his life and mind in which she had no share. Perhaps too he was trying in some half-conscious way to atone for the fact that his mind dwelt so much on that phase of his life and on the girl who had been his first love and whom he had renounced for the sake of his parents. For Christina of *Weir of Hermiston* is Stevenson's final portrait of "Claire." Though he gives her, as a disguise, his wife's coloring—Christina is "as black's your hat," as her aunt put it, and

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

her predecessors were fair—she has, at least in part, “Claire’s” tragic destiny.

In writing to his friends about *Weir of Hermiston*, Stevenson was always conscious of two facts: the book was to be his masterpiece, yet he was not happy about the plot. We have already quoted his remark to S. R. Crockett that “the plot is not good,” and we shall discuss later his reason for this dissatisfaction. Yet he was confident that the book would be the best he had yet written. “Mind you,” he wrote to Charles Baxter on December 1st, 1892, “I expect *The Justice-Clerk* to be my masterpiece.” And Lloyd Osbourne tells of Stevenson’s keen satisfaction at the way the book was going in those last weeks when he was working at it so furiously.

Stevenson was much surer of the tone and atmosphere of the story, and of the psychology of his principal characters, than he was of the later details of the plot. The throw-backs into Border history, the character of Lord Hermiston and of his son and the relation between the two, the physical setting of the action—these were elements concerning which he had thoroughly made up his mind, and he introduces them with a sureness of touch that shows no sign of hesitation anywhere. In the incomplete story as we have it there lacks nothing to set the tone and significance of the completed work. The character of Lord Hermiston is fully and richly delineated, and his relations with his son Archie, culminating in the powerful and magnificent interview of Chapter III, are set forth with a brilliance of style and subtlety of psychological insight Stevenson had displayed nowhere else. And the

FULFILMENT

whole plangent sense of Scottish history which lies behind the story is effectively introduced in the account of Mrs. Weir's ancestry in Chapter I, and in the fifth chapter, "Winter on the Moors," in which the introduction of Kirstie's dramatic narratives effectively unites past and present. The main tragedy is sufficiently foreshadowed. Only the character of Kirstie, the golden-haired elderly housekeeper of Hermiston whose character matured as Stevenson wrote about her, requires, one feels, some further touches to be fully revealed.

"I have a novel on the stocks," wrote Stevenson to Charles Baxter in December 1892, "to be called *The Justice-Clerk*. It is pretty Scotch, the Grand Premier is taken from Braxfield—(Oh, by the by, send me Cockburn's *Memorials*)—and some of the story is—well—queer. The heroine is seduced by one man, and finally disappears with the other man who shot him. . . ." In the same letter he asks for a copy of Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials* and "an absolutely correct text of the Scots judiciary oath. Also, in case Pitcairn does not come down late enough, I wish as full a report as possible of a Scotch murder trial between 1790–1820. Understand, *the fullest possible*." The letter concludes with this further request:

"Is there any book which would guide me as to the following facts?

"The Justice-Clerk tries some people capitally on circuit. Certain evidence cropping up, the charge is transferred to the J.-C.'s own son. Of course, in the next trial the J.-C. is excluded, and the case is called before the Lord-Justice General.

"Where would this trial have to be? I fear in Edinburgh, which would not suit my view. Could it be again at the circuit town?"

It is clear from this letter, and from an earlier letter to Barrie about his plans for the ending of the novel, that the pivotal point of the story was to be the father-son relationship, developed to a pitch of tragedy almost Sophoclean in its grim irony. Ever since Stevenson's own youthful conflict with his father he had been haunted by the problems and paradoxes of the relation between father and son. He treats the matter time and again in his work, generally, as in *The Story of a Lie*, in a fairly light vein, but always with sober undertones. In *Weir of Hermiston*, in which nearly all the principal events of Stevenson's early life in Scotland find reflection in some manner, he introduces this factor too, producing the conflict to its ultimate tragic extreme. This is not, of course, to say that Lord Hermiston is in the remotest degree a portrait of the author's father, whose kind and generous disposition Stevenson always appreciated, even in moments of greatest disagreement; but it does mean that in *Weir of Hermiston* we have Stevenson's last treatment of a theme that first came to interest him as a result of his own experience with his father—an experience which, had not the strong claims of affection ultimately triumphed on both sides, might well have proved tragic for both the father and the son.

In spite of the introduction of a specific tragic theme which was to dominate the novel, it is through the prevailing atmosphere which Stevenson succeeds in creating, rather than by individual events, that, in the completed portion of the book, the tragic effect is produced. As the story moves forward a Greek sense of a foretold

FULFILMENT

doom inevitably manifesting itself is gradually communicated to the reader. Character is interpreted in terms of the generations of ancestors who unconsciously moulded it; history, psychology and topography are thus brought into a close relationship, a man being what he is because of the past, and that past leaving visible and moving traces in the very features of the landscape in which he lives. We have noted Stevenson's use of topography in earlier novels, particularly *Kidnapped*, but nowhere does he use it as skilfully and as profoundly—nowhere does he put it so effectively at the service of the other elements of the story—as in *Weir of Hermiston*.

The two introductory paragraphs set the tone, linking, in a firm, quiet prose, the three elements of history, topography and character, the two elements of past and present:

"In the wild end of a moorland parish, far out of the sight of any house, there stands a cairn among the heather, and a little east of it, in the going down of the braeside, a monument with some verses half defaced. It was here that Claverhouse shot with his own hand the Praying Weaver of Balweary, and the chisel of Old Mortality has clicked on that lonely gravestone. Public and domestic history have thus marked with a bloody finger this hollow among the hills; and since the Cameronian gave his life there, two hundred years ago, in a glorious folly, and without comprehension or regret, the silence of the moss has been broken once again by the report of firearms and the cry of the dying.

" . . . To this day, of winter nights, when the sleet is on the window and the cattle are quiet in the byre, there will be told again, amid the silence of the young and the additions and corrections of the old, the tale of the Justice-Clerk and his son, young Hermiston, that vanished from men's knowledge; of the Two Kirsties and the

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Four Black Brothers of the Cauldstaneslap; and of Frank Innes, 'the young fool advocate,' that came into these moorland parts to find his destiny."

On this note, deliberately reminiscent of the Border Ballads, the story opens.

Chapter I, "Life and Death of Mrs. Weir," introduces at once that historical thread linking past and present, heredity and psychology. The narrative style is forthright and vigorous, lacking the more flamboyant elements to be found in some of the earlier adventure stories, yet not without picturesque overtones drawn directly from the Scottish Border tradition:

"The Lord Justice-Clerk was a stranger in that part of the country; but his lady wife was known there from a child, as her race had been before her. The old 'riding Rutherfords of Hermiston,' of whom she was the last descendant, had been famous men of yore, ill neighbors, ill subjects, and ill husbands to their wives though not their properties. Tales of them were rife for twenty miles about; and their name was even printed in the page of our Scots histories, not always to their credit. One bit the dust at Flodden, one was hanged at his peel door by James the Fifth; another fell dead in a carouse with Tom Dalyell; while a fourth (and that was Jean's own father) died presiding at a Hell-Fire Club, of which he was the founder. . . .

"In all these generations, while a male Rutherford was in the saddle with his lads, or brawling in a change-house, there would be always a white-faced wife immured at home in the old peel or the later mansion-house. It seemed this succession of martyrs bided long, but took their vengeance in the end, and that was in the person of the last descendant, Jean. She bore the name of the Rutherfords, but she was the daughter of their trembling wives. At the first she was not wholly without charm. Neighbours recalled in her, as a child, a strain of elfin wilfulness, gentle little mutinies, sad little gaieties, even a morning gleam of beauty that was not to be fulfilled. She withered in the growing, and (whether it was the sins of her

FULFILMENT

sires or the sorrows of her mothers) came to her maturity depressed, and, as it were, defaced; no blood of life in her, no grasp or gaiety; pious, anxious, tender, tearful, and incompetent."

It is the weak wife who descends from the violent Border family and whose ancestry provides Mr. Weir with an estate and young Archie Weir with connections both romantic and sinister. Adam Weir stands alone without ancestry, a strong self-made man who, on his elevation to the Bench, takes his title from the estate of Hermiston, brought to him by his wife. Yet the mantle of the "riding Rutherfords of Hermiston" descends on the self-made man who married into the family, whose wife, their direct descendant, is merely the last exhausted representative of a line of hard men and dominated women. Stevenson arranges the pattern thus not so as to provide for himself a conventional romantic situation in which ancient family feuds and memories can be exploited through a fast-moving adventure story. His is a serious interest in the complex of forces, historical and psychological, which determine human relationships and produce those ironic reversals and tragic paradoxes of the kind that Sophocles contemplated in writing *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare utilized in *King Lear*. *Weir of Hermiston* is different in scope from these great tragedies, but there is little basic difference in type of theme.

The courtship of Adam Weir is treated in this first chapter briefly, almost symbolically, but with sufficient detail to establish firmly for future use the essential relationship between these two unequal partners:

" . . . He was one who looked rather to obedience than beauty, yet it would seem he was struck with her at the first look. 'Wha's she?'

he said, turning to his host; and, when he had been told, ‘Ay,’ says he, ‘she looks menseful. She minds me—’; and then, after a pause (which some have been daring enough to set down to sentimental recollections), ‘Is she releegious?’ he asked, and was shortly after, at his own request, presented. The acquaintance, which it seems profane to call a courtship, was pursued with Mr. Weir’s accustomed industry, and was long a legend, or rather a source of legends, in the Parliament House. He was described coming, rosy with much port, into the drawing-room, walking direct up to the lady, and assailing her with pleasantries, to which the embarrassed fair one responded, in what seemed a kind of agony, ‘Eh, Mr. Weir!’ or ‘O, Mr. Weir!’ or ‘Keep me, Mr. Weir!’ On the very eve of their engagement it was related that one had drawn near to the tender couple, and had overheard the lady cry out, with the tones of one who talked for the sake of talking, ‘Keep me, Mr. Weir, and what became of him?’ and the profound accents of the suitor’s reply, ‘Haangit, mém, haangit.’”

The married life of Mr. and Mrs. Weir is sufficiently indicated by a few deftly told anecdotes: “When things went wrong at dinner, as they continually did, my lord would look up the table at his wife: ‘I think these broth would be better to sweem in than to sup.’ Or else to the butler: ‘Here, M’Killop, awa’ wi’ this Raadical gigot—tak’ it to the French, man, and bring me some puddocks! It seems rather a sore kind of business that I should be all day in Court haanging Raadicals, and get nawthing to my denner.’” The discussion of the couple at table ends with the most characteristic anecdote of all:

“Once only Mrs. Weir had ventured to appeal. He was passing her chair on his way into the study.

“‘O, Edom!’ she wailed, in a voice tragic with tears, and reaching out to him both hands, in one of which she held a sopping pocket-handkerchief.

FULFILMENT

"He paused and looked upon her with a face of wrath, into which there stole, as he looked, a twinkle of humour.

"'Noansensel' he said. 'You and your noansense! What do I want with a Christian fain'tly? I want Christian broth! Get me a lass that can plain-boil a potato if she was a whire off the streets!' And with these words, which echoed in her tender ears like blasphemy, he had passed on to his study and shut the door behind him."

Leaving the reader to absorb the cumulative effect of these skilfully distributed illustrations of character, Stevenson hurries on in the same chapter from "the housewifery in George Square," Edinburgh, to the country estate of Hermiston, where the redoubtable Kirstie Elliott, "an eighteenth cousin of the lady's," presides efficiently over house and table. Here, where the family spent their summer holidays, the atmosphere of legal Edinburgh gives way to that of Border history, personified in Kirstie Elliott, "once a moorland Helen and still comely as a blood horse and healthy as the hill wind. High in flesh and colour, she ran the house with her whole intemperate soul, in a bustle, not without buffets." She mothers Mrs. Weir, and wins the regard (not reciprocated) of my lord himself. It is at Hermiston that the exhausted Mrs. Weir declines and dies, but not before we are given a revealing picture of her relations with her son, Archie. Indoctrinating the child with her hazy but strongly held notions of tenderness and piety, she soon finds that she has all unwittingly brought him to a deep suspicion of his father. "Tenderness was the first duty, and my lord was invariably harsh. God was love; the name of my lord (to all who knew him) was fear. . . . There were some whom it was good to pity and well (though very likely useless) to pray for; they

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

were named reprobates, goats, God's enemies, brands for the burning; and Archie tallied every mark of identification, and drew the inevitable private inference that the Lord Justice-Clerk was the chief of sinners." Again the situation is presented to the reader by means of a few appropriate anecdotes:

" . . . I'll tell you what it is, mamma, there's a tex' borne in upon me: It were better for that man if a mile-stone were bound upon his back and him flung into the deepestmost parts of the sea."

"O my lamb, ye must never say the like of that!" she cried. "Ye're to honour faither and mother, dear, that your days may be long in the land. It's Atheists that cry out against him—French Atheists, Erchie! Ye would never surely even yourself down to be saying the same thing as French Atheists? It would break my heart to think that of you. . . ."

By the time Mrs. Weir dies, leaving Archie a sensitive and somewhat bewildered small boy, the seeds of future conflict between father and son are well and truly sown. The words of Lord Hermiston contemplating his dead wife mean more than he imagines:

" 'Her and me were never cut out for one another,' he remarked at last. 'It was a daft-like marriage.' And then, with a most unusual gentleness of tone, 'Puir bitch,' said he, 'puir bitch!' Then suddenly: 'Where's Erchie?'"

In this opening chapter of *Weir of Hermiston* Stevenson marshals his material with a sureness of touch and an economy of expression which makes it clear that he had at last fully harnessed his early developed sense of style to that almost Greek sense of the relation of character to tragedy which he developed only in his last years. The

FULFILMENT

handling of incident and imagery in such a story as *Treasure Island* is perfect for its purpose, but in *Weir of Hermiston* we have a profounder and more subtle purpose being achieved with equal dexterity. Stevenson resists all temptations to indulge in over-elaboration, to strew the opening chapter with more than the necessary minimum of those anecdotes about Lord Braxfield and the Edinburgh of his time of which he knew so many. Every detail is subordinated to the tragic pattern of the story. There is, too, for the first time in Stevenson, that total objectivity in his treatment of character—the artist's purely aesthetic "love" for his character, of the kind that Shakespeare felt equally towards Iago and Falstaff—for which he was striving in his portrait of the Master of Ballantrae, where the disproportion between character and plot prevented him from being wholly successful. The dialogue, in particular—in which he uses the Scots tongue better than any novelist of the century save Scott—is throughout the novel equally adequate in psychological truth, aesthetic probability, and dramatic expression. The achievement of "puir bitch"—a phrase which, in the context, sums up both the tragedy and the pathos of Lord Hermiston's relations with his wife without coming anywhere near the sentimental—is only one of many indications in this first chapter of *Weir of Hermiston* of Stevenson's complete mastery of his theme, his materials, and his method.

The brief second chapter, in which the relations between father and son as Archie grows older are briefly sketched, again with an effective minimum of illustrative anecdote, serves as a transition to the first great crisis of the book, in Chapter III. Stevenson took over from the

adventure story the device of interspersing crises fairly regularly throughout the novel, and *Weir of Hermiston* consists of a series of such high points each of which is prepared for and given maximum significance by the preceding chapters, in which the variety of material that we have already discussed is organized and patterned so as best to reinforce the tragic implications of the periodic moments of tension.

The crisis is precipitated swiftly and naturally:

"It chanced in the year 1813 that Archie strayed one day into the Judiciary Court. The macer made room for the son of the presiding judge. In the dock, the centre of men's eyes, there stood a whey-coloured, misbegotten caitiff, Duncan Jopp, on trial for his life. His story, as it was raked out before him in that public scene, was one of disgrace and vice and cowardice, the very nakedness of crime; and the creature heard and it seemed at times as though he understood—as if at times he forgot the horror of the place he stood in, and remembered the shame of what had brought him there. He kept his head bowed and his hands clutched upon the rail; his hair dropped in his eyes and at times he flung it back; and now he glanced about the audience in a sudden fellness of terror, and now looked in the face of his judge and gulped. There was pinned about his throat a piece of dingy flannel; and this it was perhaps that turned the scale in Archie's mind between disgust and pity. The creature stood in a vanishing point; yet a little while, and he was still a man, and had eyes and apprehension; yet a little longer, and with a last sordid piece of pageantry, he would cease to be. And here, in the meantime, with a trait of human nature that caught at the beholder's breath, he was tending a sore throat.

"Over against him, my Lord Hermiston occupied the bench in the red robes of criminal jurisdiction, his face framed in the white wig. Honest all through, he did not affect the virtue of impartiality; this was no case for refinement, there was a man to be hanged, he would have said, and he was hanging him. Nor was it possible to see his

FULFILMENT

lordship, and acquit him of gusto in the task. It was plain he gloried in the exercise of his trained faculties, in the clear sight which pierced at once into the joint of fact, in the rude, unvarnished gibes with which he demolished every figment of defence. He took his ease and jested, unbending in that solemn place with some of the freedom of the tavern; and the rag of man with the flannel round his neck was hunted gallowsward with jeers.

"Duncan had a mistress, scarce less forlorn and greatly older than himself, who came up, whimpering and curtseying, to add the weight of her betrayal. My lord gave her the oath in his most roaring voice, and added an intolerant warning."

"'Mind what ye say now, Janet,' said he. 'I have an e'e upon ye; I'm ill to jest with.'

"Presently, after she was tremblingly embarked on her story, 'And what made ye do this, ye auld runt?' the Court interposed. 'Do ye mean to tell me ye was the panel's mistress?'

"'If you please, ma lord,' whined the female.

"'Godsake! ye made a bonny couple,' observed his lordship; and there was something so formidable and ferocious in his scorn that not even the galleries thought to laugh. . . .

"When all was over, Archie came forth again into a changed world. Had there been the least redeeming greatness in the crime, any obscurity, any dubiety, perhaps he might have understood. But the culprit stood, with his sore throat, in the sweat of his mortal agony, without defence or excuse; a thing to cover up with blushes; a being so much sunk beneath the zones of sympathy that pity might seem harmless. And the judge had pursued him with a monstrous, relishing gaiety, horrible to be conceived, a trait for nightmares. It is one thing to spear a tiger, another to crush a toad; there are aesthetics even of the slaughter-house; and the loathsomeness of Duncan Jopp enveloped and infected the image of his judge."

Archie's revulsion of feeling, the whole furious turmoil of emotions of whose nature he was not very precisely aware, leads him to visit the scene of the hanging of Duncan Jopp. Watching "the brutal instant of extinction, and

the paltry dangling of the remains like a broken jumping-jack," he has yet another shock: "he had been prepared for something terrible, not for this tragic meanness. He stood for a moment silent, and then—I denounce this God-defying murder,' he shouted; and his father, if he must have disclaimed the sentiment, might have owned the stentorian voice with which it was uttered." And that evening, at the Speculative Society, Archie proposed as the next subject for debate, "Whether capital punishment be consistent with God's will or man's policy?" Nobody supported his proposal.

The tone of this part of the narrative is far removed from anything that had characterized Stevenson's previous novels. In the quiet passion of the writing it is more reminiscent of contemporary American realism—as exemplified, say, by Erskine Caldwell's *Trouble in July*—than of any of the traditions that had influenced Stevenson's development. But, unlike the modern American writer like Caldwell or William Faulkner, Stevenson is not writing his story as a preliminary to diagnosis, social or historical, but as a result of diagnosis: there is nothing tentative in his understanding of the whole complex of causes, lying in history, heredity and psychology, that produced this crisis and made it the inevitable prelude to tragedy. At the same time there is none of the swaggering confidence that characterized his earlier, more melodramatic, attempts to handle the profounder depths of human psychology and produced stories like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* which owe their effect to speed and boldness rather than to a mature insight expressed through a style stripped of all superfluous fat.

FULFILMENT

Archie is both his father's and his mother's son—more like his father than he knows, and more like his mother than is good for his peace of mind. That evening a chance meeting with Dr. Gregory (incidentally, a historical Edinburgh figure of the period) enables the doctor to bring home to Archie that his father, for all his faults, and for all his reticence, is a devoted, if silent, parent. The anecdote which Dr. Gregory tells Archie to illustrate this is itself of little importance, but its effect on Archie, in his present state, is overwhelming. Immediately the image of his father as the cruel judge and "vile jester" is replaced in his mind by another, much more disproportionate, of a man "who was all iron without and all sensibility within."

That Stevenson should have interposed between Archie's defiance of his father's principles and his interview with his father an episode of this kind is the measure of his maturity as an artist at this stage in his career. The episode with Dr. Gregory, with its violent effect on Archie's state of mind, enables Stevenson not only to keep the reader, at this important stage, in continuous sight of the fundamentals of Archie's character; it also, by arranging it so that Archie comes to meet his father not as a defiant moralist but as a penitent prepared to encounter this imaginary man of concealed sensibility, brings about a new turn in the action, preventing the story from degenerating into a simple conflict of wills and making it possible for it to develop later into a much more profound conflict by postponing for the time being the open defiance of his father by Archie which a lesser novelist would have been unable to resist introducing at this point. The

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

interview which Stevenson gives us is something much more effective, and much more significant.

This interview is one of the finest pieces of dialogue that Stevenson ever wrote:

"For a moment Hermiston warmed his hands at the fire, presenting his back to Archie; then suddenly disclosed on him the terrors of the Hanging Face.

"'What's this I hear of ye?' he asked.

"There was no answer possible to Archie.

"'I'll have to tell ye, then,' pursued Hermiston. 'It seems ye've been skirling against the father that begot ye, and one of His Majesty's Judges in this land; and that in the public street, and while an order of the Court was being executit. Forbye which, it would appear that ye've been airing your opeenions in a Coallege Debatin' Society;' he paused a moment, and, then, with extraordinary bitterness, added. 'Ye damned eediot.'

"'I had meant to tell you,' stammered Archie. 'I see you are well informed.'

"'Muckle obleeged to ye,' said his lordship, and took his usual seat. 'And so you disapprove of Caapital Punishment?' he added.

"'I am sorry, sir, I do,' said Archie.

"'I am sorry, too,' said his lordship. 'And now, if you please, we shall approach this business with a little more parteeularity. I hear that at the hanging of Duncan Jopp—and, man! ye had a fine client there—in the middle of all the riffraff of the ceety, ye thought fit to cry out, "This is a damned murder, and my gorge rises at the man that haangit him."

"'No, sir, these were not my words,' cried Archie.

"'What were yer words, then?' asked the Judge.

"'I believe I said, I denounce it as a murder!' said the son, 'I beg your pardon—a God-defying murder. I have no wish to conceal the truth,' he added, and looked his father for a moment in the face.

"'God, it would only need that of it next!' cried Hermiston. 'There was nothing about your gorge rising, then?'

"'That was afterwards, my lord, as I was leaving the Speculative.

FULFILMENT

I said I had been to see the miserable creature hanged, and my gorge rose at it.'

"Did ye, though?" said Hermiston. "And I suppose ye knew who haangit him?"

"I was present at the trial; I ought to tell you that, I ought to explain. I ask your pardon beforehand for any expression that may seem undutiful. The position in which I stand is wretched," said the unhappy hero, now fairly face to face with the business he had chosen. "I have been reading some of your cases. I was present while Jopp was tried. It was a hideous business. Father, it was a hideous thing! Grant he was vile, why should you hunt him with a vileness equal to his own? It was done with glee—that is the word—you did it with glee, and I looked on, God help me! with horror."

As the dialogue proceeds, Hermiston's speech becomes more and more Scots, while Archie's remains standard English. The difference in character and attitude between father and son, and thus the whole impassable gulf between them, is subtly elaborated in the course of the interview. In answer to Archie's account of his actions, Hermiston breaks out with a long, ironical speech in which the Scots words seem to hiss with scorn, making Archie's elegant English seem artificial and effeminate by comparison:

"You're a young gentleman that doesna approve of Caapital Punishment," said Hermiston. "Weel, I'm an auld man that does. I was glad to get Jopp haangit, and what for would I pretend I wasna? You're all for honesty, it seems; you couldna even steik your mouth on the public street. What for should I steik mines upon the bench, the King's officer, bearing the sword, a dreid to evil-doers, as I was from the beginning, and as I will be to the end! Mair than enough of it! Heedious! I never gave twa thoughts to heediousness, I have no call to be bonny. I'm a man that gets through with my day's business, and let that suffice."

"The ring of sarcasm had died out of his voice as he went on; the

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

plain words became invested with some of the dignity of the Justice-seat.

" 'It would be telling you if you could say as much,' the speaker resumed. 'But ye cannot. Ye've been reading some of my cases, ye say. But it was not for the law in them, it was to spy out your faither's nakedness, a fine employment in a son. You're splairging; you're running at lairge in life like a wild nowt. It's impossible you should think any longer of coming to the Bar. You're not fit for it, no splairger is. And another thing: son of mines or no son of mines, you have flung fylement in public on one of the Senators of the Coallege of Justice, and I would make it my business to see that ye were never admitted there yourself. There is a kind of a decency to be observit. Then comes the next of it—what am I to do with ye next? Ye'll have to find some kind of a trade, for I'll never support ye in idleset. What do ye fancy ye'll be fit for? The pulpit? Na, they could never get diveenity into that bloackhead. Him that the law of man whammles is no' likely to do muckle better by the law of God. What would ye make of hell? Wouldna your gorge rise at that? Na, there's no room for splairgers under the fower quarters of John Calvin. What else is there? Speak up. Have ye got nothing of your own?"'

Archie meekly suggests that all he is fit for is to be a soldier, but this arouses further scorn in his father:

" ' . . . I would send no man to be a servant of the King, God bless him! that has proved such a shauchling son to his own faither. You can splairge here on Edinburgh street, and where's the hairm? It doesna play buff on me! And if there were twenty thousand eediots like yourself, sorrow a Duncan Jopp would hang the fewer. But there's no splairging possible in a camp; and if you were to go to it, you would find out for yourself whether Lord Well'n'ton approves of caapital punishment or not. You a sodger!' he cried, with a sudden burst of scorn. 'Ye auld wife, the sodgers would bray at ye like cuddies! '"

Archie stands silent, and on his father's asking whether he has any other proposition begins to reply, "You have

FULFILMENT

taken this so calmly, sir, that I cannot but stand ashamed.” His father cuts him short with a remark that constitutes the climax of the dialogue:

“I’m nearer voamiting, though, than you would fancy.”

Again, the Scots pronunciation gives added power to the expression, the long vowel in “voamiting” rising to a fierce intensity of disgust.

Archie is forced to acknowledge his father’s magnanimity “with this offender,” and his father’s reply is quiet, grim, and unconsciously pathetic:

“I have no other son, ye see,’ said Hermiston. . . .”

It is finally settled that Archie shall go out to the family’s country home at Hermiston and set up as a country laird. “Ye’ll be out of hairm’s way at the least of it. If ye have to rowt, ye can rowt amang the kye; and the maist feck of the caapital punishment ye’re like to come across’ll be guddling trouts. Now, I’m no for idle lairdies; every man has to work, if it’s only at peddling ballants; to work, or to be wheepit, or to be haangit.” (The grim profession of faith rings out, at once a proverb and a challenge.) “If I set ye down at Hermiston, I’ll have to see you work that place the way it has never been workit yet; ye must ken about the sheep like a herd; ye must be my grieve there, and I’ll see that I gain by ye.”

Archie promises to do his best.

“Well then, I’ll send Kirstie word the morn, and ye can go yourself the day after,’ said Hermiston. ‘And just try to be less of an eediot!” he concluded, with a freezing smile, and turned immediately to the papers on his desk.”

And so Archie approaches his destiny on the hills.

It is to be noted that in this scene Hermiston while he

speaks Scots does not speak it consistently, or as broadly as he might. There is a sprinkling of expressive Scots words, and a Scots pronunciation of English words when that pronunciation will add the proper note of irony or scorn, such as in the final contemptuous "eediot." But it is not a consistent Scots speech. Hermiston, for example, does not regularly say "hae" for "have," "doon" for "down," or "faither" for "father." But he says "muckle obleeged," "ceety," "eediot," "haangit," "heedious," and uses such effective Scots words as "splairging," "shauchling," and "steik." Stevenson is using the dialect dramatically, not pedantically, using it to heighten the emotional effect of Hermiston's speech and emphasize the contrast between the attitude of father and son. Nowhere in English fiction has a Scottish background been put to better dramatic use.

Before Stevenson allows Archie to leave for the country he introduces him to us once more, in Chapter IV, in the urban, legal environment from which he is about to escape. His talk with the sympathetic Lord Glenalmond not only enables Stevenson to probe a little further into his hero's state of mind, but also lets him redress somewhat the balance of his picture of Edinburgh legal life. Lord Glenalmond is in many respects Lord Hermiston's antithesis, and his brief appearance in the story serves to emphasize Hermiston's position on the bench —the extreme representative of one school of manners only. Midway between Glenalmond and Hermiston stands Glenkindie, whom we see for a moment at the end of Chapter IV. In the midst of them all stands poor Archie, with his mother's sensibility and (though he does not

know it) his father's strength of will: an unhappy and maladjusted young man, who, when he drinks with Glen-almond a toast to his father, the Lord Justice-Clerk, "almost with gaiety," is giving vent to a complex of feelings which he only half understands but into which his creator has a clear and profound insight.

And so the story leaves Edinburgh and passes to the moors of Hermiston, a countryside rich in sad and violent historical associations which Archie's maternal ancestors had helped to create. *Weir of Hermiston* now enters on a new phase; a new atmosphere is introduced (it had been briefly prepared for and anticipated in the opening two paragraphs of Chapter I) and plays its part in setting the seal of inevitability on the developing tragedy.

Stevenson slows down the pace of the narrative at this point. Chapter V begins with a leisurely description of Hermiston and its environs:

"The road to Hermiston runs for a great part of the way up the valley of a stream, a favourite with anglers and with midges, full of falls and pools, and shaded by willows and natural woods of birch. Here and there, but at great distances, a byway branches off, and a gaunt farmhouse may be descried above in a fold of the hill; but the more part of the time, the road would be quite empty of passage and the hills of habitation. Hermiston parish is one of the least populous in Scotland; and, by the time you came that length, you would scarce be surprised at the inimitable smallness of the kirk, a dwarfish, ancient place seated for fifty, and standing in a green by the burn-side among two-score gravestones. The manse close by, although no more than a cottage, is surrounded by the brightness of a flower-garden and the straw roofs of bees; and the whole colony, kirk and manse, garden and graveyard, finds harbourage in a grove of rowans, and is all the year round in a great silence broken only by the drone of the bees, the tinkle of the burn, and the bell on

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Sundays. A mile beyond the kirk the road leaves the valley by a precipitous ascent, and brings you a little after to the place of Hermiston, where it comes to an end in the back-yard before the coach-house. All beyond and about is the great field of the hills; the plover, the curlew, and the lark cry there, the wind blows as it blows in a ship's rigging, hard and cold and pure; and the hill-tops huddle one behind another like a herd of cattle into the sunset."

This is the Scotland of his memories, the hills and moorlands where the martyrs lay buried. As the story develops this background emerges more and more clearly as a dominant influence if not on the actual course of the action at least on its mood and meaning. A casual reference to Sir Walter Scott (Mr. Sheriff Scott as he was then) further extends the Border associations; and then Archie makes his appearance in this carefully prepared setting:

"... But the house was wind and weather proof, the hearths were kept bright, and the rooms pleasant with live fires of peat; and Archie might sit of an evening and hear the squalls bugle on the moorland, and watch the fire prosper in the earthy fuel, and the smoke winding up the chimney, and drink deep of the pleasures of shelter."

It is, of course, almost routine (but none the less effective in the context of the story) that Archie should gradually become something of a recluse, his own shyness and sense of difference from others, developed by his experiences with his father, leading him to shun the society of the shallow young men of the district and even of the desirable young women. "It was in his horoscope to be parsimonious of pain to himself, or of the chance of pain, even to the avoidance of any opportunity of pleasure; to have a Roman sense of duty, an instinctive aristocracy of

FULFILMENT

manners and taste; to be the son of Adam Weir and Jean Rutherford."

And then we are introduced to Kirstie, the magnificent housekeeper of Hermiston, a character who grows in stature as the story progresses, almost without the writer's awareness. Her feeling for Archie "partook of the loyalty of a clanswoman, the hero-worship of a maiden-aunt, and the idolatry due to a god." An intimacy of a kind grows up between the two so different characters, an unequal intimacy which "has never been uncommon in Scotland, where the clan spirit survives; where the servant tends to spend her life in the same service, a helpmeet at first, then a tyrant, and at last a pensioner; where, besides, she is not necessarily destitute of the pride of birth, but is, perhaps, like Kirstie, a connection of her master's, and at least knows the legend of her own family, and may count kinship with some illustrious dead." It is important that Stevenson should emphasise this kinship at this point, for he proceeds immediately to give an account of the tales of her family that Kirstie would tell Archie over the fire of an evening, and these tales would lose much of their point if we do not see them as referring to a family tradition which both Kirstie and Archie share, referring to the Rutherfords as well as to the Elliots and to that mixture of violence and melancholy which lay behind Archie's maternal ancestry.

In reporting Kirstie's tales of the Elliots of Cauldstaneslap Stevenson manages to infuse the spirit of the Border ballads into the narrative in a way that Scott himself might have envied. Yet, picturesque as this historical or pseudo-historical material is, it does not represent

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

simply the introduction of a picturesque historical background for its own sake, such as we find in some of the incidents of *Kidnapped*. It represents part of Archie's environment and part, too, of his heredity, and the grim story of the death of Gilbert of Cauldstaneslap tolls like a bell through the chapter, at once an explanation and a warning. Everywhere we are presented with evidence of hidden depths in ordinary-seeming people, and the mood of an as yet unspecified tragedy is slowly prepared. Coming after the account of Archie's conflict with his father, with all its implications and foreshadowings, this chapter of *Weir of Hermiston* takes on even greater significance than it would possess alone. The chapter ends with a reference to young Christina, younger sister of the "four black brothers" of Cauldstaneslap, the dead Gilbert's last born child, and Kirstie's niece. Archie soon grows curious, as the saga of the family continues and the girl is passed over:

"Is there not a girl too?" he asked.

"Ay. Kirstie. She was named from me, or my grandmother at least—it's the same thing," returned the aunt. . . .

"But what is your niece like?" said Archie at the next opportunity.

"Her? As black's your hat! But I dinna suppose she would maybe be what you would ca' *ill-looked* a' thegither. Na, she's a kind of a handsome jaud—a kind o' gipsy," said the aunt, who had two sets of scales for men and women—or perhaps it would be more fair to say that she had three, and the third and the most loaded was for girls.

"How comes it that I never see her in church?" said Archie.

"Deed, and I believe she's in Glesgie with Clem and his wife. . . ."

FULFILMENT

But in the next chapter Christina comes to Cauld-staneslap.

The reader knows by the end of Chapter V that Archie and Christina will fall in love, but this does not diminish the force and beauty of the chapter in which the process is described. Only once in his life was Stevenson able to rid himself of his inhibitions and write freely and convincingly about love between the sexes. In describing the relations between Christina and Archie he seems to have had his own early love affair in Edinburgh more clearly in mind than ever before, for though the details differ the emotion is there—the emotion of a man of good family in love with an innocent country girl whom ill-chance brings to a condition popularly regarded as the very reverse of innocent. This latter development does not occur until a later part of the story, whose plot we know though Stevenson did not live to write it, whereas in Stevenson's own experience it may have happened before he met the girl. But the situation in each case has the same emotional context, and one is inclined to conjecture that Stevenson deliberately changed the coloring of his heroine (for his early Highland love had been fair, like Catriona) as an instinctive act of caution. However this may be, the fact remains that Stevenson in the last months of his life, when his mind was turning more and more to his own youth in Scotland, produced for the first time a love story authentic in its psychology, moving in its details, and perfectly integrated with the larger story of which it is a part.

The ground is well prepared for the first encounter of

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Archie and Christina. Starved of companionship, refusing the advances of the sophisticated young men (and women) of the world from neighbouring families, he had throughout the winter gradually developed into the recluse of Hermiston. Sunday after Sunday he would go to church and face the uncongenial rustic congregation. “‘O for a live face,’ he thought; . . . and at times he would study the living gallery before him with despair, and would see himself go on to waste his days in that joyless, pastoral place, and death come to him, and his grave be dug under the rowans, and the Spirit of the Earth laugh out in a thunder-peal at the huge fiasco.” And then, one Sunday, the first breath of Spring warmed the earth and stirred his imagination; and that same day he saw in church, for the first time, young Christina Elliott, back from visiting her uncle in Glasgow.

All this is narrated in a simple, lilting prose: the lilt is not over-emphasised, but it is unmistakable. “About her face clustered a disorder of dark ringlets, a little garland of yellow French roses surmounted her brow, and the whole was crowned by a village hat of chipped straw. Amongst all the rosy and all the weathered faces that surrounded her in church, she glowed like an open flower—girl and raiment, and the cairngorm that caught the daylight and returned it in a fiery flash, and the threads of bronze and gold that played in her hair.” The rise and fall of the sentence, coming to rest in a quiet series of well-placed monosyllables, is characteristic of Stevenson’s prose in this sixth chapter. “I wonder, will I have met my fate?” she thought, and her heart swelled.”

Their glances meet in church, more than once, and the

FULFILMENT

shock of emotion is strong in both. On the way back from church Archie overtakes her, alone; and after this there is no turning back.

There is a lyrical intensity in all the dialogue between Archie and Christina. The lilt emerges here somewhat more strongly, yet it is always controlled, never merely sentimental or gushing. Even when, in their second interview, the talk turns to romantic speculation on "all the old people before us—Rutherfords of Hermiston, Elliotts of Cauldstaneslap—that were here but a while since, riding about and keeping up a great noise in this quiet corner" (Archie is speaking) and Christina is moved to "sooth" to Archie the song her brother Dand made about the old Border families, Stevenson is careful to motivate the introduction of this note by drawing attention to Archie's heightened mood and Christina's adroit skill in playing up to it as she "watched, womanlike, for any opportunity to shine, to abound in his humour, whatever that might be." Thus a faint note of irony stands on guard as she sings softly to Archie:

"O they rade in the rain, in the days that are gane,
In the rain and the wind and the lave,
They shoutit in the ha' and they routit on the hill,
But they're a' quaitit noo in the grave.
Auld, auld Elliotts, clay-cauld Elliotts, dour, bauld Elliotts of auld."

Thus with one skilful stroke Stevenson links the love story to the plaintive sense of history which is such an important emotion in the book and at the same time carries that love story a step further forward. He keeps a firm grasp on the psychology of his characters, and is never

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

himself carried away by their emotion (which is what distinguishes an unsentimental from a sentimental handling of such a theme). With this particular incident over, Stevenson does not proceed to introduce a romantic commentary in his own person: he remains the clear-eyed observer, and all the emotion belongs to the characters:

"He arose instinctively, she also, for she saw she had gained a point, and scored the impression deeper, and she had wit enough left to flee upon a victory. They were but commonplaces that remained to be exchanged, but the low, moved voices in which they passed made them sacred in the memory. In the falling greyness of the evening he watched her figure winding through the morass, saw it turn a last time and wave a hand, and then pass through the Slap, and it seemed to him as if something went along with her out of the deepest of his heart. And something surely had come, and come to dwell there. He had retained from childhood a picture, now half-obliterated by the passage of time and the multitude of fresh impressions, of his mother telling him, with the fluttered earnestness of her voice, and often with dropping tears, the tale of the "Praying Weaver," on the very scene of his brief tragedy and long repose. And now there was a companion piece; and he beheld, and he should behold for ever, Christina perched on the same tomb, in the grey colours of the evening, gracious, dainty, perfect as a flower, and she also singing—

'Of old, unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago,'

—of their common ancestors now dead, of their rude wars composed, their weapons buried with them, and of these strange changelings, their descendants, who lingered a little in their places, and would soon be gone also, and perhaps sung of by others at the gloaming hour. By one of the unconscious arts of tenderness the two women were enshrined together in his memory. Tears, in that hour of sensibility, came into his eyes indifferently at the thought of either, and

FULFILMENT

the girl, from being something merely bright and shapely, was caught up into the zone of things serious as life and death and his dead mother."

The sequel follows rapidly. Young Frank Innes, a very personable young man but shallow and something of a bounder, finds it expedient, for his own reasons, to pay a long visit to his former friend at Hermiston, and discovers the clandestine love affair between him and Christina. Irritated and offended at Archie's indifference to himself, he takes pleasure in warning Archie "as a friend" of the dangers involved in the game he is playing, and Archie, though furious with Frank, has enough wit to realize that his friend's remarks have some substance: if he and Christina are eventually to marry they must not risk their future happiness by compromising behavior; they must be more circumspect for the present and hope eventually that the engagement can be managed in an orthodox manner, satisfactory to both their families. Kirstie, who has also discovered Archie's secret, adds her affectionate but anxious advice, thinking that her favorite is about to seduce her niece, and Archie swears to do Christina "no wrong." The scene between Archie and Kirstie is done with unusual insight, and with a vigorous eloquence that underlines the tragic implications of the theme.

Moved more by Kirstie's than by Frank's advice, Archie meets Christina the next afternoon at the Praying Weaver's Stone, their usual rendezvous, and what follows is the last great crisis of the book as Stevenson left it. Full of his newly made resolution to be prudent, for both

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

their sakes, Archie only succeeds in both offending and bewildering Christina.

"He stood before her some way off. 'Kirstie, there's been too much of this. We've seen too much of each other.' She looked up quickly and her eyes contracted. 'There's no good ever comes of these secret meetings. They're not frank, not honest truly, and I ought to have seen it. People have begun to talk; and it's not right of me. Do you see?'

"I see somebody will have been talking to ye,' she said sullenly.

"They have, more than one of them,' replied Archie.

"And whae were they?" she cried. 'And what kind o' love do ye ca' that, that's ready to gang round like a whirligig at folk talking? Do ye think they havena talked to me?'

"Have they indeed?" said Archie, with a quick breath. 'That is what I feared. Who were they? Who has dared—'

"Archie was on the point of losing his temper.

"As a matter of fact, not any one had talked to Christina on the matter; and she strenuously repeated her own first question in a panic of self-defence.

"Ah, well! what does it matter?" he said. 'They were good folk that wished well to us, and the great affair is that there are people talking. My dear girl, we have to be wise. We must not wreck our lives at the outset. They may be long and happy yet, and we must see to it, Kirstie, like God's rational creatures and not like fool children. There is one thing we must see to before all. You're worth waiting for, Kirstiel worth waiting for a generation; it would be enough reward.'—And here he remembered the schoolmaster again, and very unwisely took to following wisdom. 'The first thing that we must see to, is that there shall be no scandal about, for my father's sake. That would ruin all; do ye no' see that?'

"Kirstie was a little pleased, there had been some show of warmth of sentiment in what Archie had said last. But the dull irritation still persisted in her bosom; with the aboriginal instinct, having suffered herself, she wished to make Archie suffer."

FULFILMENT

The climax comes when Archie admits to Christina that one of the persons who have been talking to him about their affair is Frank Innes:

" 'Mr. Frank!' she cried. 'What nex', I would like to ken?'

" 'He spoke most kindly and truly.'

" 'What like did he say?'

" 'I am not going to tell you; you have nothing to do with that,' cried Archie, startled to find he had admitted so much.

" 'Oh, I have naething to do with it!' she repeated, springing to her feet. 'A'body at Hermiston's free to pass their opinions upon me, but I have naething to do wi' it! Was this at prayers like? Did ye ca' the grieve into the consultation? Little wonder if a'body's talking, when you make a'body ye're confidants! But as you say, Mr. Weir—most kindly, most considerately, most truly, I'm sure,—I have naething to do with it. And I think I'll better be going. I'll be wishing you good-evening, Mr. Weir.' And she made him a stately curtsey, shaking as she did so from head to foot, with the barren ecstasy of temper.

"Poor Archie stood dumbfounded. She had moved some steps away from him before he recovered the gift of articulate speech.

" 'Kirstiel' he cried. 'Oh, Kirstie woman!'

"There was in his voice a ring of appeal, a clang of mere astonishment that showed the schoolmaster was vanquished.

"She turned round on him. 'What do ye Kirstie me for?' she retorted. 'What have ye to do wi' me? Gang to your ain freends and deave them!'

"He could only repeat the appealing 'Kirstiel'

" 'Kirstie, indeed!' cried the girl, her eyes blazing in her white face. 'My name is Miss Christina Elliott, I would have ye to ken, and I daur ye to ca' me out of it. If I canna get love, I'll have respect, Mr. Weir. I'm come of decent people, and I'll have respect. What have I done that ye should lightly me? what have I done? What have I done? what have I done?' and her voice rose upon the third repetition. 'I thocht—I thocht—I thocht I was sae happy!' and the first sob broke from her like the paroxysm of some mortal sickness.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Archie ran to her. He took the poor child in his arms, and she nestled to his breast as to a mother's, and clasped him in hands that were strong like vices. He felt her whole body shaken by the throes of distress, and had pity upon her beyond speech. Pity, and at the same time a bewildered fear of this explosive engine in his arms, whose works he did not understand, and yet had been tampering with. There arose from before him the curtains of boyhood, and he saw for the first time the ambiguous face of woman as she is. In vain he looked back over the interview; he saw not where he had offended. It seemed unprovoked, a wilful convulsion of brute nature."

These were the last words that Stevenson wrote—or rather dictated. They were dictated to his step-daughter, Mrs. Strong, on the morning of his fatal seizure. *Weir of Hermiston* remains a fragment.

It can be argued, however, that, like Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, the fragment is a complete work of art in itself. It is indeed probable that had he lived to finish it Stevenson might have marred the perfection of the existing fragment by forcing on it a too ingenious ending. In the uncompleted book as we have it all the main elements are already present: the background in history, heredity and topography; the psychological situation; the foreshadowing of Frank Innes' future conduct and of Archie's reaction to it; the clear suggestion that this new turn of events will bring Archie once again into conflict with his father, this time in a much grimmer manner; and the equally clear suggestion that something in the Border background of the story—something connected with the earlier exploits of the four black brothers of Cauldstane-slap—would finally intervene to provide a resolution. The nature of that resolution is still quite obscure, and perhaps it is better that it should be. Here, in *Weir of Hermiston*

FULFILMENT

ton as Stevenson left it, we have an embryo tragedy, perfectly presented, none of the elements lacking, not a false note anywhere in the telling. The climax on which it ends is a genuine climax, though not a genuine conclusion: it marks the final breakdown of Archie's attempt to define his own relations with destiny, while the prior introduction of Frank Innes makes it clear what new turn the story is going to take. True, the story lacks much of the development, and the resolution, yet both are foreshadowed. The reader comes to an end with some feeling of aesthetic satisfaction, of total presentation, even though so much of the story remains untold. Certainly *Weir of Hermiston* is better this way than with a too carefully manipulated series of subsequent incidents, culminating in a forced happy ending. And from what we know of Stevenson's intentions there was a possibility that he might not have been able to sustain the story at the high level of eloquent tragedy of the existing narrative.

Sir Sidney Colvin summarised the intended argument of *Weir of Hermiston*, so far as it was known to Mrs. Strong, as follows:

"Archie persists in his good resolution of avoiding further conduct compromising to young Kirstie's good name. Taking advantage of the situation thus created, and of the girl's unhappiness and wounded vanity, Frank Innes pursues his purpose of seduction; and Kirstie, though still caring for Archie in her heart, allows herself to become Frank's victim. Old Kirstie is the first to perceive something amiss with her, and believing Archie to be the culprit, accuses him, thus making him aware for the first time that mischief has happened. He does not at once deny the charge, but seeks out and questions young Kirstie, who confesses the truth to him; and he, still loving her, promises to protect and defend her in her trouble. He then has an inter-

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

view with Frank Innes on the moor, which ends in a quarrel and in Archie killing Frank beside the Weaver's Stone. Meanwhile the Four Black Brothers, having become aware of their sister's betrayal, are bent on vengeance against Archie as her supposed seducer. They are about to close in upon him with this purpose, when he is arrested by the officers of the law for the murder of Frank. He is tried before his own father, the Lord Justice-Clerk, found guilty, and condemned to death. Meanwhile the elder Kirstie, having discovered from the girl how matters really stand, informs her nephews of the truth: and they, in a great revulsion of feeling in Archie's favour, determine on an action after the ancient manner of their house. They gather a following, and after a great fight break the prison where Archie lies confined, and rescue him. He and young Kirstie thereafter escape to America. But the ordeal of taking part in the trial of his own son has been too much for the Lord Justice-Clerk, who dies of the shock. 'I do not know,' adds the amanuensis, 'what becomes of old Kirstie, but that character grew and strengthened so in the writing that I am sure he had some dramatic destiny for her.'"

The proposed course of the narrative as sketched above is borne out by references in Stevenson's letters, yet, as we have already noted, he was not satisfied with the plot as he had planned it, and was in considerable doubt as to the propriety of a happy ending. Writing to Barrie in November 1892 about the ending of *The Little Minister*, he points out what every sensitive reader must agree to be a central truth about the story—it "ought to have ended badly; we all know it did; and we are infinitely grateful to you for the grace and good feeling with which you lied about it." He goes on to cite an example of the opposite problem—*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, which ought to have ended happily but which ends unhappily without any necessity in terms of the preparation laid down by the author. It is clear that in planning *Weir of*

FULFILMENT

Hermiston Stevenson was much exercised about this question of aesthetic probability in fiction. He goes on from his discussion of *The Little Minister* and *Richard Feverel* to discuss his own book: "It might have so happened," he says of the ending of Meredith's novel; "it needed not; and unless needs must, we have no right to pain our readers. I have had a heavy case of conscience of the same kind about my Braxfield story. Braxfield—only his name is Hermiston—has a son who is condemned to death; plainly, there is a fine tempting fitness about this; and I meant he was to hang. But now on considering my minor characters, I saw there were five people who would—in a sense who must—break prison and attempt his rescue. They were capable, hardy folks, too, who might very well succeed. Why should they not then? Why should not young Hermiston escape clear out of the country? and be happy, if he could, with his—but soft! I will not betray my secret nor my heroine. Suffice it to breathe in your ear that she was what Hardy calls (and others in their plain way don't) a Pure Woman." (One might note incidentally here that "Claire," too, had been what Hardy calls—and others in their plain way don't—a Pure Woman.)

But speculation on what Stevenson might have done with *Weir of Hermiston* remains after all only speculation. All that we can say is that there is not a false touch in the story as we have it, but that, judging from the precedent of *The Master of Ballantrae* and the fact that Stevenson more than once showed himself lacking in the kind of stamina necessary to produce a story to its logical conclusion without flinching or wearying, he might have been

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

tempted by weakness or fatigue or other reasons to do some violence to the integrity of the story had he continued with it. *Weir of Hermiston* as we have it is both the most mature and the most perfect thing Stevenson ever wrote, and we need not regret that it remains a fragment. It is one of the great fragments of English literature.

2

The novels that Stevenson wrote in collaboration with his step-son Lloyd Osbourne fall somewhat apart from his other work. The interest here is more in the ingenuity of the plot and the manipulation of the adventures, and there is little trace of that developing profundity which marks Stevenson's unaided work from *The Master of Ballantrae* to *Weir of Hermiston*. Stevenson never, of course, lost his interest in the pure adventure story, and Osbourne, with his interest in exciting plot and picturesque character, was a natural collaborator in those less serious of his later works in which the emphasis was on the events, the sheer story in the simplest sense. *The Wrong Box*, a would-be comic story depending for its effect solely on the complications of the "intrigue," was Osbourne's idea, but the story aroused Stevenson's enthusiasm and he revised Osbourne's draft with alacrity. It appeared in 1889 and was not very favourably reviewed. It is indeed a dreary piece of fooling and all the elaborate ingenuity of the plot fails to compensate for the basic mechanical dullness of the work. Stevenson, however, persisted in regarding the book as uproariously funny, calling it "a real lark" in a letter to the editor of *Scribner's*, and protesting to Charles Baxter

FULFILMENT

that "if it is not funny, I am sure I do not know what is. I have split over writing it." His later collaborations were both more serious and more successful: both *The Wrecker* and *The Ebb-Tide* are works deserving of some attention.

Writing to Henry James from Vailima in October 1891, Stevenson remarked of *The Wrecker*: "It's a machine, you know—don't expect aught else—a machine, and a police machine; but I believe the end is one of the most genuine butcheries in literature; and we point to our machine with a modest pride, as the only police machine without a villain. Our criminals are a most pleasing crew, and leave the dock with scarce a stain upon their characters." But though the central portion of the book is a "machine"—that is, an elaborately contrived mystery, whose elements include danger and acts of violence—*The Wrecker* as it was finally written by Stevenson and his stepson owes its form to the fact that Stevenson was unwilling to produce a book that was merely a "police machine" and insisted on filling it out with other material to avoid writing a novel that "remains entralling, but insignificant, like a game of chess, not a work of human art." He decided that "if the tale were gradually approached, some of the characters introduced (as it were) beforehand, and the book started in the tone of a novel of manners and experience briefly treated, this defect might be lessened and our mystery seem to inhere in life." The result is a curiously unwieldy book—in a sense, three books in one—in which the main line of the story is not even commenced until the novel is almost a third completed. The early scenes of life in Paris are a series of sketches, done entirely by

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Stevenson, derived from his own experiences in France many years before. In the treatment of Loudon Dodd's relations with his father we have one of the many handlings of the father-son relationship which, as we have noted, haunted Stevenson ever since his own trouble with his father as a very young man. Most of the San Francisco scenes also derive from Stevenson's own experiences, while the adventures at sea, and the central situation round which the novel is built, derive from the exuberant imagination of Lloyd Osbourne. The final scene at Barbizon is again pure Stevenson, and again derived from his own experiences th re. In a letter to his cousin R. A. M. Stevenson he explained some of his difficulties in writing *The Wrecker*:

"Yes, it is in the matter of the book, of course, that collaboration shows; as for the manner, it is superficially all mine, in the sense that the last copy is all in my hand. Lloyd did not even put pen to paper in the Paris scenes or the Barbizon scene; it was no good, he wrote and often rewrote all the rest; I had the best service from him on the character of Nares. You see, we had been just meeting the man, and his memory was full of the man's words and ways. And Lloyd is an impressionist, pure and simple. The great difficulty of collaboration is that you can't explain what you mean. I know what kind of effect I mean a character to give—what kind of *tache* he is to make; but how am I to tell my collaborator in words? Hence it was necessary to say, 'Make him So-and-so'; and this was all right for Nares and Pinkerton and Loudon Dodd, whom we both knew, but for Bellairs, for instance—a man with whom I passed ten minutes fifteen years ago—what was I to say? and what could Lloyd do? I, as a personal artist, can begin a character with only a haze in my head, but how if I have to translate the haze into words before I begin? In our manner of collaboration (which I think the only possible—I mean that of one person being responsible, and giving the *coup de pouce*

FULFILMENT

to every part of the work) I was spared the obviously hopeless business of trying to explain to my collaborator what *style* I wished a passage to be treated in. These are the times that illustrate to a man the inadequacy of spoken language. Now—to be just to written language—I can (or could) find a language for my every mood, but how could I *tell* any one beforehand what this effect was to be, which it would take every art I possessed, and hours and hours of deliberate labour and selection and rejection, to produce? These are the impossibilities of collaboration. Its immediate advantage is to focus two minds together on the stuff, and to produce in consequence an extraordinary richness of purview, consideration, and invention."

Though it is true that by "focussing two minds together on the stuff" the authors of *The Wrecker* had managed to achieve "an extraordinary richness of purview, consideration, and invention," it is equally true that the book resolves itself into a loose, almost picaresque, novel, whose interest lies in the entertaining variety of scenes and characters rather than in the integrated structure as a whole. Considered as a mature effort at serious fiction, it has all sorts of faults; read for its entertainment value simply, as a grouping of autobiographical sketches, picturesque anecdotes, individual character studies, and one exciting mystery, it is still one of the most enjoyable of Stevenson's works. But one appreciates it on an entirely different level from that at which *Weir of Hermiston* or even *The Master of Ballantrae* is read—or even *Treasure Island*, which is a perfectly constructed adventure story with a structural unity which itself possesses an aesthetic value. *The Wrecker* is the very best of reading for a long train journey, or on any occasion for which a lively and attractive anthology would be appropriate. It represents not Stevenson the mature writer but Stevenson the lover

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

of the amusing, exciting or autobiographical incident for its own sake.

The Ebb-Tide, first published serially in *To-Day* between November 1893 and February 1894, was originally intended to be a much longer work than the short novel which it turned out to be. "It is by me and Mr. Osbourne," wrote Stevenson to S. R. Crockett from Vailima in May 1893, "and is really a singular work. There are only four characters, and three of them are bandits—well, two of them are, and the third is their comrade and accomplice. It sounds cheering, doesn't it? Barratry, and drunkenness, and vitriol, and I cannot tell you all what, are the beams of the roof. And yet—I don't know—I sort of think there's something in it." To Edmund Gosse a few weeks later he wrote of the book as "a dreadful, grimy business in the third person, where the strain between a vilely realistic dialogue and a narrative style pitched about (in phrase) 'four notes higher' than it should have been has sown my head with grey hairs; or I believe so—if my head escaped, my heart has them." Shortly afterwards he referred to the book in a letter to Henry James in stronger terms: "It seems as if literature were coming to a stand. I am sure it is with me; and I am sure everybody will say so when they have the privilege of reading *The Ebb Tide*. My dear man, the grimness of that story is not to be depicted in words. There are only four characters, to be sure, but they are such a troop of swine! And their behaviour is really so deeply beneath any possible standard, that on a retrospect I wonder I have been able to endure them myself until the yarn was finished. . . . If the admirers

FULFILMENT

of Zola admire him for his pertinent ugliness and pessimism, I think they should admire this."

It is clear that *The Ebb-Tide* troubled him. Though the first draft of the story was Osbourne's, Stevenson worked it over completely and re-wrote the second half altogether. The book was an attempt to move from the purely picturesque adventure story to a more profound interpretation of human actions and motives, without abandoning the incidents proper to an adventure story. It is a grim and powerful tale, much better than the traditional critics of Stevenson would have us believe, with something of the quiet intensity of *The Beach at Falesa*. Nevertheless it is not wholly satisfactory: Stevenson was poised between two species of writing (species represented at their extremes by *Treasure Island* and *Weir of Hermiston*) and *The Ebb-Tide* tends to fall between the two. The style is "neutral" and at times dull: he had given up the speed and colour of his earlier narrative style but had not yet discovered the rich and sensitive prose of *Weir of Hermiston*. *The Ebb-Tide* is, indeed, more interesting for what it tells us about the state of Stevenson's art at the time he wrote it than as a story in itself. He was just about to get down to *Weir of Hermiston* (he wrote to Crockett on May 17th that *The Ebb-Tide* had just been finished while *Weir of Hermiston* "is as yet scarce begun") and was about to gather his powers for that great final spurt of energy which lasted until the day of his sudden death. "The truth is," he wrote to Gosse the following June, "I have a little lost my way and stand bemused at the cross-roads. A subject? Ay, I have dozens;

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

I have at least four novels begun, they are none good enough; and the mill waits, and I'll have to take second best."

The Ebb-Tide was thus written at the most critical stage in Stevenson's development as an artist. He was having moments of gloom and doubt which, though no new thing with him, seemed this time to have some more fundamental significance. He was thinking more and more of Scotland and his youth, and realising more and more clearly that he would never see his native country again. Five years before he had written from his Pacific voyages to his old Edinburgh friend Charles Baxter a couple of verses of poetry that struck the key-note of much of his later thought:

. . . Home was home then, my dear, full of kindly faces,
Home was home then, my dear, happy for the child.
Fire and the windows bright glittered on the moorland;
Song, tuneful song, built a palace in the wild.
Now, when day dawns on the brow of the moorland,
Lone stands the house and the chimney-stone is cold.
Lone let it stand, now the friends are all departed,
The kind hearts, the true hearts, that loved the place of old.

In the years that followed, this note was to recur again and again: we have already quoted some passages from his letters, in particular from the letter of May 17th, 1893, to S. R. Crockett, illustrating this. The recurrence of this note indicated not only a growing homesickness: it was also one of the signs of a growing crisis in his attitude to his art. That crisis came in 1893. The fact that in *The Ebb-Tide* he depended on his step-son's imagination to provide a plot and then re-wrote the story himself in

FULFILMENT

an uninspired prose style but with an eye and mind intent on every incident that illustrated the lack of dignity in man (how different the villains in *The Ebb-Tide* from Long John Silver or even the Master of Ballantrae)—this fact is in itself an indication that Stevenson had come to some sort of parting of the ways in his career. Though, as the foregoing pages have sought to make clear, Stevenson's development was continuous throughout his career, there were definite periods during which he took the more significant steps. The period between the finishing of *The Ebb-Tide* and his final burst of enthusiastic work on *Weir of Hermiston* was a decisive one in his career, like the period which precedes middle age: it is followed either by a decided decline in powers or by their sudden strengthening. It was the tragedy of Stevenson's career that this new strengthening, carrying him to a height of achievement he never before approached, was cut short so soon by death.

It is thus possible to see much of Stevenson's collaboration with his stepson as a sort of marking time while, not always with his own knowledge, important new developments in his art were germinating.

5. ESSAYS AND POEMS

1

STEVENSÓN STARTED HIS CAREER AS A WRITER OF ESSAYS AND belles lettres, and it has long been the fashion to esteem him as an essayist and dismiss the novels. Part of the intention of the present study has been to redirect attention to the novels as the most impressive expression of Stevenson's genius, particularly in his later years. Stevenson's early "occasional" writing represented a particularly self-conscious form of literary apprenticeship, in which he was endeavouring to develop a style and assert himself as a professional writer. While this branch of his work contains much that is interesting and charming, it is often too much the deliberate display of craftsmanship without any underlying imaginative compulsion to transform the work into a serious piece of literary art. *An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey*, his two early travel books, are replete with neatly phrased observations and carefully cadenced asides to a degree that is often disturbing: one has the feeling here that literature

ESSAYS AND POEMS

does not exist in order to illuminate life, but life exists in order to provide an excuse for literature. The journey with a donkey in the Cévennes was undertaken simply in order to write a book about it when it was over, and this deliberate organizing of one's life in order to have something to write about results in a certain lack of any compelling insight in the writing, which turns out to be a sort of high-grade literary exercise.

A high-grade literary exercise is not to be sneered at: it takes a gifted and conscientious writer to produce one. And if the writer produces such exercises at the beginning of his career it is a good sign—it shows that he has no romantic illusions about creative genius providing for its happy possessor ready-made masterpieces without the necessity of hard work and conscious striving after perfection. No writer in English ever put himself through his literary apprenticeship more vigorously than Stevenson. From his earliest years he was experimenting with prose style, "playing the sedulous ape," imitating one model after another, in order to provide himself with the necessary facility. And after he had flouted his father's wishes by choosing literature as his profession—first giving up the family profession of lighthouse engineering for law, then giving up law for literature—he felt all the more urgently the necessity of justifying himself as a professional writer. He had to produce "professional" writing as soon as possible. He was the artist, the man of letters, who kept company with fellow artists in Fontainebleau and Barbizon: he had rejected the bourgeois way of life, scorning the respectability of the douce Edinburgh citizen. He had now to show the world—which meant,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

though he did not quite admit it to himself, show his father—that he had the right to pursue this course.

Stevenson's early prose writing is thus a series of attempts to demonstrate his status as a professional writer. He looks for material on which to apply style. But his development as an essayist parallels his career as a novelist, and, as he matured, his essays, like his novels, came more and more to be serious interpretations of his own youth where the subject-matter arose unbidden as a result of memory and imagination together supplying new insights.

An Inland Voyage, Stevenson's first book, published in 1878, is perhaps the most self-conscious of all his works. The preface, in which he coyly presents himself to his public as an author of some originality and possessed of some quaint and neatly-phrased ideas, is a sufficient indication of the book's quality. The opening paragraph, with two references to himself first as "author" and then as "writer," its affected modesty and deliberate self-portrait as the man of letters making his first acquaintance with his public, is almost a parody of the style of much of his early writing:

"To equip so small a book with a preface is, I am half afraid, to sin against proportion. But a preface is more than an author can resist, for it is the reward of his labours. When the foundation stone is laid, the architect appears with his plans, and struts for an hour before the public eye. So with the writer in his preface. he may never have a word to say, but he must show himself for a moment in the portico, hat in hand, and with an urbane demeanour."

Phrases like "I am half afraid," and "more than an author can resist" indicate that note of coy autobiography

characteristic of the young author who is self-conscious about his public. And when in the second paragraph of the preface he goes on to proclaim that "I am not yet able to dissemble the warmth of my sentiments towards a reader" he is at once making a genuine confession and endeavouring, with mock humility, to claim an advantage from his inexperience. As the preface proceeds the artificiality of style increases and at the same time the inverted modesty becomes clearer as self-advertisement:

"I wonder, would a negative be enticing? For, from the negative point of view, I flatter myself this volume has a certain stamp. Although it runs to considerably upwards of two hundred pages, it contains not a single reference to the imbecility of God's universe, nor so much as a single hint that I could have made a better one myself,—I really do not know where my head could have been. I seemed to have forgotten all that makes it glorious to be man. 'Tis an omission that renders the book philosophically unimportant; but I am in hopes the eccentricity may please in frivolous circles."

The irony here is that of the precocious schoolboy, and the affectations of diction—" 'tis an omission," "I am in hopes"—suggest a similar immaturity. One has only to put this preface beside the introductory paragraphs of *Weir of Hermiston* to see how far Stevenson developed in his less than twenty years as a professional writer.

The body of the book is, however, less obvious in its immaturity than the preface. There is much direct, clean, descriptive writing, with sentences of one clause deftly interpolated between longer sentences of two or three clauses of which the third and longest falls away in a pleasing cadence. Already we see that sentence structure that is to be so characteristic of Stevenson in his essays:

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

"But we are all for tootling on the sentimental flute in literature; and not a man among us will go to the head of the march to sound the heady drums." "But in our brave Saxon countries, where we plod threescore years and ten in the mud, and the wind keeps singing in our ears from birth to burial, we do our good and bad with a high hand and almost offensively; and make even our alms a witness-bearing and an act of war against the wrong." "But some woods are more coquettish in their habits; and the breath of the forest Mormal, as it came aboard upon us that showery afternoon, was perfumed with nothing less delicate than sweetbriar." "There was still a long way to go by the winding course of the stream, and darkness had fallen, and a late bell was ringing in Origny Sainte-Benoîte, when we arrived." These sentences, with the deliberate fall in the last clause, nearly always occur at the end of a paragraph, where they provide an effective close. The pattern is, however, repeated somewhat too regularly. In his later prose Stevenson learned to vary his cadences more, though this remained his favourite basic pattern. One notes how frequently the last clause of these sentences begins with the conjunction "and," the end of the sentence often providing a sort of illustrative supplement to the point made by the first part. The same device will be found, more sonorously used, in the prose of Sir Thomas Browne, one of the many writers who influenced the early Stevenson.

An Inland Voyage, in spite of its self-conscious moralizing digressions and the author's too deliberate attempt to "use" every incident and observation as a peg on which to hang his style, is still pleasant reading, and the at-

ESSAYS AND POEMS

mosphere of thoughtful and civilized relaxation which emanates from its pages is not the worst mood a young writer can cultivate. The virtues as well as the affectations of the book are well illustrated in the conclusion of the section on Noyon Cathedral:

"I can still see the faces of the priests as if they were at my elbow, and hear *Ave Maria, ora pro nobis* sounding through the church. All Noyon is blotted out for me by these superior memories; and I do not care to say more about the place. It was but a stack of brown roofs at the best, where I believe people live very reputably in a quiet way; but the shadow of the church falls upon it when the sun is low, and the five bells are heard in all quarters, telling that the organ has begun. If ever I join the church of Rome I shall stipulate to be Bishop of Noyon on the Oise."

In *Travels with a Donkey* (1879) the writing is freer and more flexible; the style is moulded around the subject-matter, whereas in *An Inland Voyage* subject-matter had to give way to style. Stevenson is still writing as a self-conscious stylist, an elegant purveyor of deftly balanced sentences and cunning allusions, but the whole journey described is so obviously a light-hearted *jeu d'esprit* undertaken for the sake of the impressions and ideas that might result, that the reader is content to see in the book merely the skilful expression of such impressions and ideas. To say that there is any fundamental difference between the methods of *An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey* would be to exaggerate: the two works are obviously companion pieces written with a similar end in view. But the latter book is less coy and more self-confident than the former, and though we recognise the same tricks and devices, there is something in the con-

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

text that allows us to accept them more readily in the spirit in which they were produced. The very first sentence of the introductory note to Sidney Colvin strikes a less affected note than the opening of the preface to *An Inland Voyage*: "The journey which this little book is to describe was very agreeable and fortunate for me." It is true that it continues: "But we are all travellers in what John Bunyan calls the wilderness of this world,—all, too, travellers with a donkey; and the best that we find in our travels is an honest friend"—which is a rather forced and (in the bad sense) "literary" metaphor, purporting to be less obvious and more significant than it really is. But in the work as a whole such allusions and digressions are thrown out in a sort of cavalier spirit, as though the author does not much care how seriously we take them, which prevents them from appearing pretentious or ridiculous or simply affected.

Nevertheless, *Travels with a Donkey*, like *An Inland Voyage*, is a show piece, a sort of Prize Essay, with the author demonstrating all the tricks of the trade that he has learnt. It is so obviously in the tradition of English essay writing that it sometimes appears less of an original work than a clever pastiche, and sometimes almost a parody:

"At what inaudible summons, at what gentle touch of Nature, are all these sleepers thus recalled in the same hour to life? Do the stars rain down an influence, or do we share some thrill of mother earth below our resting bodies? Even shepherds and old country-folk, who are the deepest read in these arcana, have not a guess as to the means or purpose of this nightly resurrection. [A pure Thomas Browne sentence.] Towards two in the morning they declare the thing takes

ESSAYS AND POEMS

place; and neither know nor inquire further. [A jump of nearly two centuries: this might be Lamb.] And at least it is a pleasant incident. We are disturbed in our slumber only, like the luxurious Montaigne, 'that we may the better and more sensibly relish it.' [Note the conventional quotation and the carefully chosen epithet.] We have a moment to look upon the stars, and there is a special pleasure for some minds in the reflection that we share the impulse with all outdoor creatures in our neighbourhood, that we have escaped out of the Bastille of civilisation, [in this figure we have the bright schoolboy at work] and are become, for the time being, a mere kindly animal and a sheep of Nature's flock."

If one reads over this paragraph as a whole, however, the balanced rise and fall of the prose becomes evident at once. In the final sentence we have that same pattern which we noted in *An Inland Voyage*, and, coming where it does, it gives that effect so common in Stevenson's essays—the effect of a wave receding on the beach after having broken, dispersed, and become reintegrated in a different form. We get it again and again in both these books: one has only to go through the paragraphs and note their endings: "Cattle awake in the meadows; sheep break their fast on dewy hillsides, and change to a new lair among the ferns; and houseless men, who have lain down with the fowls, open their dim eyes and behold the beauty of the night." The trick largely consists of making the final clause of the sentence considerably longer, and more complex in structure, than the preceding clauses.

Stevenson's shorter essays—of the kind collected in *Virginibus Puerisque* and *Memories and Portraits*—are for the most part attempts to deal elegantly and deftly with certain clearly defined subjects. Primarily exercises in literary craftsmanship, they are nevertheless extremely

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

important to any critic who is seeking a full understanding of Stevenson's moral and aesthetic attitude. For as Stevenson grew older his essays became more and more a sort of mental overflow into which he put expressions and confessions that arose directly out of the development of his inner mental life. A very early essay, such as that on "Roads" which he published in the *Portfolio* in 1873, or "An Old Scottish Gardiner," originally contributed to his short-lived Edinburgh University Magazine and later refurbished for *Virginibus Puerisque*—are little more than pleasing demonstrations of the mastery of a style. And even this mastery of a style is somewhat too deliberate, too obvious, to constitute complete mastery. The cunning variation of clause and sentence lengths, the shaping of the paragraph, the mixture of boldness and coyness in the use of the first personal pronoun—all of which we still see in some degree in *An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey*—are rather too obviously the work of an apprentice. The apprentice is, however, both skilful and conscientious, and modern critics who complain that this part of Stevenson's work smacks too much of the lamp often underestimate the importance of this kind of self-discipline in prose style. "I lived with words," wrote Stevenson in an often quoted passage. "It was not so much that I wished to be an author (though I wished that too) as that I had vowed that I would learn to write. That was a proficiency that tempted me; and I practised to acquire it, as men learn to whittle, in a wager with myself." The careful student of Stevenson will be inclined to discount that qualification, "it was not so much that I wished to be an author," for it seems to have been pre-

ESSAYS AND POEMS

cisely this wish that motivated all this zealous practice in writing; but, apart from this, the statement is clearly true and explains a great deal about Stevenson's early work.

"Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me," wrote Stevenson in that same essay, "in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and to Obermann." The student of Stevenson's essays will be able to note the influence of the prose writers in this group.

It was not long, however, before Stevenson's essays began to show in their subject-matter a definite trend of thought, or the development of a number of related thoughts—a fact which is attributable less to any deliberate change of emphasis from "form" to "content" than to the simple truth that if one goes on writing essays long enough one is forced by sheer lack of subject-matter to give up mere pastiche for some degree of direct or indirect self-revelation. Stevenson's self-revelation, in spite of the fact that he so often uses the first person, is generally indirect. His moralizings, his advice to young and old, his reminiscences and confidences, are not naive

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

self-revelations: they are the product of a personality which Stevenson assumed as a result of his experiences as a young man in Edinburgh. We have already noted that combination of bohemianism and moralizing so characteristic of much of Stevenson's earlier fiction; and the brand of ethical hedonism which he preaches in *Virginibus Puerisque* and elsewhere—the apparent cynicism turning almost at the last moment into a heroic cry for courage—is but another aspect of the same phenomenon, with the same cause. This young man who presumes to tell his readers what is good and bad in life and to instruct them in the methods of getting through their allotted span in the most creditable way, naturally falls into the role of adviser because he feels that his own experience—the conflict between romantic passion and family affection, with the latter winning after an unhappy struggle—qualifies him for it. We shall never be able to understand fully Stevenson's attitude to his readers as displayed in so many of his essays unless we see his position as the man of superior experience deriving from that conflict. As we have seen, it was a conflict whose memory remained with him always and grew stronger as he grew older.

Stevenson cannot, of course, tell his readers why he feels that he has the right to advise them, nor can he come out openly in the character of a man who gave up his first love, with all its bohemian and unrespectable implications, for the sake of his family and respectability. He poses all the more fiercely as a bohemian because he has renounced the ultimate implications of bohemianism, and he plays

ESSAYS AND POEMS

his part as moralist all the more readily in order to cover up what is perhaps a secret feeling that when the real choice came he had neither the courage nor the selfishness to act on his own principles. But after he had made the choice a second time, secretly following another man's wife to America and finally marrying her, some sort of resolution between the two elements in his nature—the love of family and the love of adventure—was reached: his marriage was not a bohemian affair altogether, for it resulted in the acquisition of a respectable and efficient wife who was warmly accepted by his family; yet it was anything but a conventional affair. With this compromise (not, of course, that it was consciously adopted as such) a certain emotional tranquillity descended on Stevenson under whose influence he began his career as a novelist.

Stevenson's essays, then, can very roughly be said to begin as exercises, continue as advice about living from one who has had the ultimate experience, and eventually develop as a comparatively uninhibited investigation of his own childhood and youth. One might add that Stevenson the moralist can be seen throughout all these phases, for there was an inherent love of preaching in Stevenson's character. One must also mention a further category—his essays on Samoan affairs, reflecting his practical interest in Samoan politics arising out of his settling in Vailima in the character of paternal "laird."

All this is, of course, to simplify. The psychology of literary creation is more subtle and more profound than the literary critic or historian likes to believe, and it would certainly be rash to "account for" the subject-matter of

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Stevenson's essays by the kind of simple biographical scheme suggested here. Such a scheme provides only the barest skeleton—perhaps even less, a frame of reference or a series of related and relevant factors—which the reader of Stevenson's work can utilize in his own way.

A note which appears in many of Stevenson's early essays, a direct expression of an important side to his character which is unrelated to the emotional problems posed by his relation to his family, is what one might call the "open air-cum-tobacco" note which is most simply expressed in "Walking Tours." This sense of the countryside, linked so strongly to a peculiarly male sense of human comfort, is of interest to the historian of ideas as being a sort of hedonistic counterpart of the Wordsworthian view of nature. The development of this feeling throughout the nineteenth century—Hazlitt was an earlier exemplar, and his influence on Stevenson was considerable—is a subject for some future Ph.D. student: it was a feeling which became more and more manifest as the century drew to a close, and which came to its somewhat decadent climax in the early years of the present century. It lingered on in many of the Georgian poets and essayists. But it was in Stevenson that this attitude achieved its most disciplined expression, both in his essays and in certain passages in the novels.

In "Walking Tours" this attitude is expressed with a certain youthful lushness: it is to be found more adequately and maturely expressed in his later work: but the early expression is worth quoting as it sets the keynote for much subsequent writing both in the essays and novels:

ESSAYS AND POEMS

"But it is at night, and after dinner, that the best hour comes. There are no such pipes to be smoked as those that follow a good day's march; the flavour of the tobacco is a thing to be remembered, it is so dry and aromatic, so full and so fine. If you wind up the evening with grog, you will own there never was such grog; at every sip a jocund tranquillity spreads about your limbs, and stirs easily in your heart. If you read a book—and you will never do so save by fits and starts—you will find the language strangely racy and harmonious; words take a new meaning; single sentences possess the ear for half an hour together; and the writer endears himself to you, at every page, by the nicest coincidence of sentiment. It seems as if it were a book you had written yourself in a dream. . . . If the evening be fine and warm, there is nothing better in life than to lounge before the inn door in the sunset, or lean over the parapet of the bridge, to watch the weeds and the quick fishes. It is then, if ever, that you taste Joviality to the full significance of that audacious word. Your muscles are so agreeably slack, you feel so clean and so strong and so idle, that whether you move or sit still, whatever you do is done with pride and a kingly sort of pleasure. You fall in talk with any one, wise or foolish, drunk or sober. And it seems as if a hot walk purged you more than of anything else, of all narrowness and pride, and left curiosity to play its part freely, as in a child or a man of science. You lay aside all your own hobbies, to watch provincial humours develop themselves before you, now as a laughable farce, and now grave and beautiful like an old tale."

One notices here the characteristically cadenced sentences, the effective variations in their length and the number of clauses, and the slow ebbing of the paragraph to its close. And one sees in the sentiments here expressed an attitude to nature and to the human scene that is later, in a subtilized and maturer form, to provide the emotional background for many episodes in the novels. It is also the mood in which much of his later reminiscences of his youth in Scotland is to be presented. More

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

and more, as Stevenson grew older, he came to bathe all of Scotland in some such light—a light modified, to a considerable degree, by a developing sense of history and a melancholy deriving from nostalgia, yet still recognizable as that which emanates from his earlier essays.

Stevenson's attitude to the countryside—symbolized by the image of a young man leaning over a rustic bridge in the evening calm, with the smoke from his pipe rising gently into the still air, and a stone's throw away a comfortable inn awaiting him with a well-cooked meal and a bottle of good claret—is an attitude which has come to be essentially British: it is sharply distinguished from modern German *Wanderlust* with its serious hiking and from the American habit of roughing it in great national parks or on dude ranches. It is a modern British phenomenon, developed largely by writers at the end of the last and the beginning of the present century, though its roots go back into the past. Stevenson in his essays and elsewhere in his writing presents the northern, Scottish version of this attitude, though it is not until comparatively late in his career that these northern elements become pronounced. Archie's walks in *Weir of Hermiston* represent the final development: the English village gives way to Scottish moorland. Between Rupert Brooke's Grantchester and Stevenson's Hermiston lies the complete range of modern British literary treatment of the countryside—at least until the beginning of the first World War.

Stevenson's essays present a mine of information for the biographer who is interested in reconstructing his childhood and youth, as well as to the critic who is concerned with tracing the development of his literary ideals.

ESSAYS AND POEMS

The reminiscences of his childhood which fill *Memories and Portraits* find their way into every Life of Stevenson. Life at his grandfather's Colinton manse, at the Swanston cottage and on the streets of Edinburgh is portrayed with a wealth of revealing detail—detail which the reader will find again, in a transmuted form, in the novels. In "Memoirs of an Islet" Stevenson freely confesses the use he makes of this autobiographical material:

"Those who try to be artists use, time after time, the matter of their recollections, setting and resetting little coloured memories of men and scenes, rigging up (it may be) some especial friend in the attire of a buccaneer [as he did with Henley in *Treasure Island*], and decreeing armies to manoeuvre, or murder to be done, on the play-ground of their youth. But the memories are a fairy gift which cannot be worn out in using. After a dozen services in various tales, the little sunbright pictures of the past still shine in the mind's eye with not a lineament defaced, not a tint impaired. . . .

"One or two of these pleasant spectres I think I have laid. I used one but the other day: a little eyot of dense, freshwater sand, where I once waded deep in butterburs, delighting to hear the song of the river on both sides, and to tell myself that I was indeed and at last upon an island. Two of my puppets lay there a summer's day, hearkening to the shearers at work in riverside fields and to the drums of the gray old garrison upon the neighbouring hill. And this was, I think, done rightly: the place was rightly peopled—and now belongs not to me but to my puppets—for a time at least. In time, perhaps, the puppets will grow faint; the original memory swim up instant as ever; and I shall once more lie in bed, and see the little sandy isle in Allan Water as it is in nature, and the child (that was once me) wading there in butterburs; and wonder at the instancy and virgin freshness of that memory; and be pricked again, in and out of season, by the desire to weave it into art."

We have already sufficiently emphasized how Stevenson returned again and again to the memories of his child-

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

hood and youth in Scotland, and suggested some reasons for the great homecoming of his imagination in his last works. The haunting of his imagination, in all phases of his career, by Edinburgh and the Pentland Hills can perhaps only be fully realized by a reader who, like Stevenson (and the present writer), spent his childhood and youth amid those same scenes. Certainly essays like the "picturesque notes" on Edinburgh have a quality for the Edinburgh Scot which they do not possess to the same degree for others. This may explain why the cult of Stevenson in his native town has never been, as it has been elsewhere, a purely literary cult: it is more a biographical cult, manifesting itself in poring over the writer's Edinburgh associations, in reprinting with accompanying illustrations those of his works which describe local scenes, and in keeping bright all his connections with the city's sights, sounds and personalities.

In an essay like "A Plea for Gas Lamps" Stevenson is deliberately circling round a single Edinburgh memory, playing with it, developing it, drawing a moral from it, in perhaps a too self-conscious manner. The whole subject of this essay is treated much more adequately in the brief poem "The Lamplighter," where he finally succeeded in giving perfect expression to the childhood emotion with which he saw the lamplighter going his rounds. The relation between the essay and the poem is interesting: it illustrates how Stevenson would not leave a dominating recollection alone until he had—in his own phrase—finally laid the pleasant spectre. In some degree nearly the whole of *A Child's Garden of Verses* is a re-writing

ESSAYS AND POEMS

of the autobiographical essays in a more direct and immediate form of expression.

The best of Stevenson's essays, whether they are straightforward reminiscences of his youth, or speculations and moralizings based on such reminiscences, or simply studies in the picturesque, show a carefully cultivated style utilized to give expression to a dominating emotional rhythm. This emotional rhythm recurs again and again in Stevenson's "occasional" writing, which is no so much "emotion recollected in tranquillity" as tranquil recollection breeding emotion. His account of his childhood delight in Skelt's Juvenile Drama in "A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured"; his study of his own youthful imagination in "A Gossip on Romance"; his pictures of the shores of Fife in "Random Memories"; his accounts of his native city in "Edinburgh: picturesque Notes"—all these are more than careful exercises in descriptive writing: they show a writer trying to discover the bases of his own sensibility, exploring the nature and origin of those transient but significant moods which constituted the well-spring of all his writing that was not mere hack work. It is a perfectly natural transition that takes him, in "The Lantern-Bearers," from an account of childhood escapades by the sea to a discussion of the nature of art and of happiness:

"For, to repeat, the ground of a man's joy is often hard to hit. It may hinge at times upon a mere accessory, like the lantern, it may reside, like Dancer's, in the mysterious inwards of psychology. It may consist with perpetual failure, and find exercise in the continued chase. It has so little bond with externals (such as the observer scrib-

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

bles in his note-book) that it may even touch them not; and the man's true life, for which he consents to live, lie altogether in the field of fancy. The clergyman, in his spare hours, may be winning battles, the farmer sailing ships, the banker reaping triumphs in the arts: all leading another life, plying another trade from that they chose; like the poet's housebuilder, who, after all is cased in stone,

'By his fireside, as impotent fancy prompts,
Rebuilds it to his liking.'

In such a case the poetry runs underground. The observer (poor soul, with his documents!) is all abroad. For to look at the man is but to court deception. We shall see the trunk from which he draws his nourishment; but he himself is above and abroad in the green dome of foliage, hummed through by winds and nested in by nightingales. And the true realism were that of the poets, to climb up after him like a squirrel, and catch some glimpse of the heaven for which he lives. And the true realism always and everywhere is that of the poets: to find out where joy resides, and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all. In the joy of the actors lies the sense of any action. That is the explanation, that the excuse. To one who has not the secret of the lanterns, the scene upon the links is meaningless. And hence the haunting and truly spectral unreality of realistic books. Hence, when we read the English realists, the incredulous wonder with which we observe the hero's constancy under the submerging tide of dullness, and how he bears up with his jibbing sweetheart, and endures the chatter of idiot girls, and stands by his whole unfeatured wilderness of an existence, instead of seeking relief in drink or foreign travel. Hence in the French, in that meat-market of middle-aged sensuality, the disgusted surprise with which we see the hero drift sidelong, and practically quite untempted, into every description of misconduct and dishonour. In each, we miss the personal poetry, the enchanted atmosphere, that rainbow work of fancy that clothes what is naked and seems to ennable what is base; in each life falls like dough, instead of soaring away like a balloon into the colours of the sunset; each is true, each inconceivable; for no man lives in the external truth, among salts and acids, but in the warm, phantasmagoric chamber of his brain, with the painted windows and the storied walls."

ESSAYS AND POEMS

The modern reader looks askance at this pretentious and perhaps at the same time commonplace philosophising. But that is because the modern reader is generally out of sympathy with the kind of mood and emotion to which Stevenson is here referring. There are fashions in states of mind as in other matters, and the combination of melancholy, morality and sensuality into an individual philosophy that is part stoicism and part hedonism is a blend of thought that has ceased to be popular. But at least no modern reader will deny that it is an appropriate frame of mind in which to contemplate the Scottish countryside in which Stevenson spent so much of his youth. When, as in *Across the Plains* and *The Amateur Emigrant*, he engaged in recollections less amenable to such treatment the result was much less successful.

The Amateur Emigrant, *The Silverado Squatters* and *Across the Plains* are all more important as sources for Stevenson's biography than as literary works in their own right. The latter two were originally written as sketches for magazine publication and all three show signs of having been produced under strain, sometimes when the author was in dismal health with barely enough strength to hold the pen. But Stevenson's mastery of his craft stood him in good stead, and though these works lack the emotional depth that characterizes his best essays they are at least clearly and competently written. They cover the period of his life between his leaving Glasgow for America in June 1879, in secrecy and poverty, to join his future wife, and the happier turn in his fortunes which preceded his return to Scotland and his final reconciliation with his family in the summer of the following year.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

In a brief study such as this we must forego any discussion of these works, and omit, too, any account of those writings on Samoan affairs in which Stevenson engaged in the latter part of his life. As the Laird of Vailima he took a generous interest in native problems, and his views, though they made little impression at the time, are surprisingly similar in many points to those of the more enlightened framers of colonial policy in Britain today. His passionate defence of Father Damien, first published as "an open letter to the Reverend Dr. Hyde of Honolulu" in the *Scots Observer*, May, 1890, is an eloquent and characteristic plea for the recognition of virtue even when it does not take the normal middle-class forms, and can easily be related to the blend of morality and bohemianism we have noted in his earlier works. A *Footnote to History* and *War in Samoa* represent more ambitious attempts to record and diagnose the Samoan situation of the time, and illustrate the lively and sympathetic interest with which he regarded the natives.

Paternalistic yet individualistic, conservative yet anti-imperialist, Stevenson's views on Samoan affairs represent a synthesis easily understandable by anyone who follows the development of his attitude from his bohemian youth to that final period of his life when his views on all problems of conduct had blended into the simple and generous morality to which he gave full expression in "A Christmas Sermon":

"To be honest, to be kind—to earn a little and to spend a little less, to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce when that shall be necessary and not be embittered, to keep a few friends but these without capitulation—above all, on the same

ESSAYS AND POEMS

grim condition, to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy."

And again:

"There is an idea abroad among moral people that they should make their neighbours good. One person I have to make good: myself. But my duty to my neighbour is much more nearly expressed by saying that I have to make him happy—if I may."

This attitude—which is the attitude of "Lay Morals" and many of the later essays—was easier to adopt in Vailima than in London, and it is perhaps because Stevenson spent his last years remote from modern industrial civilization that he was able to preserve this moral equanimity at a time when his contemporaries were moving more and more towards pessimism. True, there is much of the stoical optimism of his friend Henley in Stevenson—an optimism, that is to say, that is deliberately assumed in order to test the will—but there remains a basic simplification of moral problems which seems to derive from the fact that Stevenson had by now retired from modern society and saw men only in their more elemental social relations. In his final years Stevenson's didactic writings became largely irrelevant though agreeable: few would disagree with him, but many would argue that his remarks, if they were intended as a guide to behavior in the modern industrial world, were somewhat beside the point.

Most of Stevenson's critical essays, particularly the early essays collected in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, are for the most part examples of that species of

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

criticism which consists in the skilful elaboration and illustration of a single point. They are not free investigations into the nature and value of the works considered: the author starts with a "point"—a set of personal reactions, a historical situation, a thesis of one kind or another—and uses it as he used the map in *Treasure Island*, as something to be filled in later with appropriate illustrations. Just as, in many of his adventure stories, Stevenson would start with a picturesque scene which invited, as it were, incidents to suit, so in these short critical essays he would start with a pattern and proceed to put into this pattern as much of the author's works as would conveniently fit. It is therefore in a sense a very formal criticism, a craftsman's and not a philosopher's criticism, a criticism which takes the form of elegant exercises in filling in a map, in finding incidents appropriate to a scene.

Stevenson was perfectly conscious of the limitations of this kind of critical writing; but he chose it deliberately, being at this time interested in the more purely formal aspects of the critic's art. "Short studies are, or should be, things woven like a carpet, from which it is impossible to detach a strand," he wrote in the preface to *Familiar Studies*. The writer of such studies "is bound to make [his] condensation logical and striking." "Like Hales with Pepys, he must nearly break his sitter's neck to get the proper shadows on the portrait." And again: "In the short study, the writer, having seized his 'point of view,' must keep his eye steadily to that. He seeks, perhaps, rather to differentiate than truly to characterize. The pro-

ESSAYS AND POEMS

portions of the sitter must be sacrificed to the proportions of the portrait."

Nearly all the *Familiar Studies* provide examples of this species of critical writing. The essay on Victor Hugo's romances, for example, starts off with a thesis, the "map" that is later to be filled in with appropriate material. The "map" in this case is taken from history: it takes the form of a comparison between Fielding, Scott and Hugo, with the explanation that Scott marks the movement away from the purely dramatic novel of Fielding into the romantic novel of modern times and that Hugo represents the culmination of the movement begun by Scott. The difference between the dramatic and romantic novels is explained in terms of the author's use of picturesque historical and natural backgrounds in building up the significance of the action. This thesis is then illustrated by a discussion of each of Hugo's four great romances: in each discussion he brings in sufficient material to illustrate the relation of that particular work to his general thesis. Though awarding praise and blame for specific virtues and defects, though noting certain exceptions and certain departures from the true "romantic" method, he returns to the main thesis at the conclusion of the essay, taking a final view of his map, now suitably filled in with appropriate examples from Hugo's works. "Romance," he sums up, "is a language in which many persons learn to speak with a certain appearance of fluency; but there are few who can ever bend it to any practical need, few who can ever be said to express themselves in it. It has become abundantly plain in the foregoing examination that Vic-

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

tor Hugo occupies a high place among those few. . . . Those elements that only began to show themselves timidly, as adjuncts, in the novels of Walter Scott, have usurped ever more and more of the canvas; until we find the whole interest of one of Hugo's romances centering around matter that Fielding would have banished from his altogether, as being out of the field of fiction." The Fielding-Scott-Hugo progression is now developed to its fullest extent; the thesis has been illustrated, modified somewhat in the illustration, and finally strengthened as the essay concludes.

Stevenson's many essays on books and literary personalities will always possess interest as workmanlike examples of "occasional" critical writing. But further than as demonstrations of his craftsmanship and, occasionally, of his views on his own art and, more occasionally, of his own psychological state at a given point in his career, they are not of any great value. They rarely result in illuminating the subject to the same extent that they present a pleasing pattern and structure, nor do they illuminate the author. They are the by-products of a professional author, and have no more and no less interest than this description would suggest. Those who read his critical essays today read them not to gain new insight into their subjects, but to enjoy the grace and skill of the sentence structure and the patterning of the whole. And even this grace and skill are not of the highest order, for too often Stevenson turned these pieces out simply for the sake of getting something published in a periodical. As a result, the writing too rarely takes wing, but jogs conscientiously and competently along the ground.

Stevenson's poetry is perhaps of more interest to the biographer than to the critic, for it is in his verse that he most fully reveals certain significant moods and attitudes which do not emerge clearly in his prose. The new material made available by Mr. George Hellman in 1915 and 1921 made it abundantly clear that it was in verse that Stevenson gave expression to the melodramatic revolt against convention which played such an important part in his youthful life at Edinburgh. The record of his love for "Claire" and its aftermath, the expression of the swaggering bohemianism ("I sneer between two puffs of smoke. Give me the publican and harlot") which he affected in his student days, and the voice of that genuine misery which followed his surrender to the *mores* of his family—

"I have left all upon the shameful field,
Honour and Hope, My God! and all but life"—

all this is to be found in the verse in which he secretly gave vent to his feelings. But this verse was not in the Stevenson tradition as that tradition, largely through his wife's efforts but not without his own co-operation in later years, came to be established; and it was long after his death and after his wife's death that the world came to know this phase of his character and writing.

But this poetry is of little interest as poetry. It is competent versification in traditional forms; the lines are often neatly turned, the metre is always regular, the stanzas are reasonably well constructed. It is essentially the poetry of an apprentice prose writer—of one who is training

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

himself to manipulate words carefully, who has a good ear for the simpler cadences, but for whom poetry is not the natural and inevitable means of expression. Only the obviously genuine quality of the emotion occasionally raises the verse from the level of competent versification to moving poetry. But much is affectation, with the bohemian mood imitated from traditional sources.

Stevenson does occasionally succeed, however, in this early verse, in capturing the very spirit of old student song, the spirit of the Wandering Scholars of the Middle Ages, with which he was always in close sympathy. If Stevenson had lived long enough to write a review of Helen Waddell's *The Wandering Scholars* he might have given us his greatest piece of non-fictional prose writing: that unwritten review is one of the great hypothetical masterpieces of literature.

Stevenson first appeared before the public as a poet with *A Child's Garden of Verses*, 1885. Six of these pieces had appeared in the *Magazine of Art* the previous year. The original title was to have been *Penny Whistles*, and proofs of a volume with this title were sent by Stevenson to certain of his friends and relatives in 1883. The book as finally published, however, was considerably larger than the originally projected collection, and it was Stevenson's first published book of poems.

The poems of *A Child's Garden of Verses* are almost all attempts to capture some particular and clearly remembered childhood mood or scene, and their effectiveness depends on the extent to which they succeed in doing this. The idea was suggested by Kate Greenaway's *Birth-day Book for Children*, but Stevenson's essentially auto-

ESSAYS AND POEMS

biographical poems draw their real inspiration from his own memories. The childhood moods expressed in the poems are fairly limited in number; the same ones recur frequently, establishing principal *motifs* which run through the collection. And the scenes familiar to his childhood similarly recur, though not mentioned by name—the garden of his grandfather's manse at Colinton, his parents' house at 17 Heriot Row, and the cottage at Swans-ton; and all the sights and sounds of the Edinburgh of the late 1850's and early 1860's.

Stevenson was a sickly child, and as he lay in bed with one of his numerous childhood illnesses he would be forced to depend largely on his imagination for his entertainment. "The Land of Counterpane" was all too familiar to him, and the imaginative qualities which this familiarity helped him to cultivate stood him in good stead throughout his childhood and beyond. All his daily activities as a small boy were transmuted into significant and exciting episodes. Travel was a theme that haunted him continually: the river flowing on through unvisited regions to the sea; the road winding away into the unknown—these are recurring symbols, so that even his bed becomes a boat in which to sail away to foreign parts:

My bed is like a little boat;
Nurse helps me in when I embark;
She girds me in my sailor's coat
And starts me in the dark.

And again:

From breakfast on through all the day
At home among my friends I stay,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

But every night I go abroad
Afar into the Land of Nod.

It is the same theme that we find in so many of his early essays and short stories.

This travel theme is found again and again in *A Child's Garden of Verses*. We see it in one of its more elemental forms in "Foreign Lands":

Up into the cherry tree
Who should climb but little me?
I held the trunk with both my hands
And looked abroad on foreign lands. . . .

I saw the dimpling river pass
And be the sky's blue looking-glass;
The dusty roads go up and down
With people tramping into town.

And then the child's ambition:

If I could find a higher tree
Farther and farther I should see,
To where the grown-up river slips
Into the sea among the ships. . . .

The simple metrical scheme and the straightforward, concrete imagery convey with great purity the child's view of the world and its activities. We see it again when he writes of sailing paper boats down the stream:

On goes the river
And out past the mill,
Away down the valley,
Away down the hill.

ESSAYS AND POEMS

Away down the river,
A hundred miles or more,
Other little children
Shall bring my boats ashore.

The sense of the world's diversity, the exciting realization of the fact that at any given moment all sorts of different things are happening in all sorts of different places, was continually impressing him as a child:

The rain is raining all around,
It falls on field and tree,
It rains on the umbrellas here,
And on the ships at sea.

And again:

While here at home, in shining day,
We round the sunny garden play,
Each little Indian sleepy-head
Is being kissed and put to bed.

And when at eve I rise from tea,
Day dawns beyond the Atlantic Sea;
And all the children of the West
Are getting up and being dressed

The idea of a map as the symbol of travel and adventure, which Stevenson used so effectively in *Treasure Island*, underlies many of these poems. The countryside as seen from a tree-top, the thin line of the river winding its way through ever further off places into the distant sea, is a favourite image: we hardly need Stevenson's use of the balloon in *St. Ives* to remind us that had he lived

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

in the age of aviation he would have delighted in the idea of the countryside as viewed from an airplane. We find the same idea again in "The Swing":

Up in the air and over the wall,
Till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside. . . .

The theme of adventure is naturally closely linked to that of travel:

Where shall we adventure, to-day that we're afloat,
Wary of the weather and steering by a star?
Will it be to Africa, a-steering of the boat,
To Providence, or Babylon, or off to Malabar?

Occasionally a note of adult sophistication creeps into the travel poems:

I should like to rise and go
Where the golden apples grow. . . .

but more often the childhood attitude is remembered and captured:

We built a ship upon the stairs
All made of the back-bedroom chairs,
And filled it full of sofa pillows
To go a-sailing on the billows.

We took a saw and several nails,
And water in the nursery pails;
And Tom said, "Let us also take
An apple and a slice of cake;"—

ESSAYS AND POEMS

Which was enough for Tom and me
To go a-sailng on, till tea.

To be at home and yet to enjoy the thrill of travel—this was one of the ideals of Stevenson's childhood (we can see how closely related it is to his later combination of bohemian adventure with fireside pipe-smoking). "From a Railway Carriage," describing an experience which neatly combines comfort with adventure, is thus a poem of particular interest. The child sits still and is carried through the map:

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,*
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clammers and scrambles,—
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;
And there is the green for stringing the daisies!
Here is a cart run away in the road
Lumping along with man and load,
And here is a mill and there is a river:
Each a glimpse and gone for ever!

Throughout these poems can be found the sights and sounds of the Edinburgh of Stevenson's childhood, as they impinged on the mind of a child. In the summer time, it is the trees and flowers of Colinton Manse and

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

the long light evenings when "I have to go to bed by day." In the winter, it is the warm fireside interior contrasted with the chill dark outside; the lamplighter going on his rounds as the early dusk descends; the indistinct sound of grown-ups talking by the lamplight as the child lies in bed upstairs or hunts imaginary wild animals behind the sofa; the howling wind racing round the city on a stormy night. Stevenson was very sensitive to the changes the different seasons brought to his native city: the two extremes were the sunny "garden days" of mid-summer and the cosy winter interiors:

Sing a song of seasons!
Something bright in all!
Flowers in the summer,
Fires in the fall!

The poems of the *Garden* show an equal lingering over the garden days of summer and the "happy chimney-corner days" of winter: there is "something bright in all" the seasons, and always in describing them he emphasizes specific images drawn from his own childhood memories:

The lamps now glitter down the street;
Faintly sound the falling feet;
And the blue even slowly falls
About the garden trees and walls.

Now in the falling of the gloom
The red fire paints the empty room:
And warmly on the roof it looks,
And flickers on the backs of books.

This is in the true Scottish poetic tradition: Henryson, Dunbar, Fergusson and Burns all excelled in the paint-

ESSAYS AND POEMS

ing of interiors, and though Stevenson has not the technical skill or the intense poetic imagination of his predecessors, confining himself as he does to the deliberately restricted area of childhood reminiscence, it is impossible not to be struck by this general resemblance. The Fifeshire interior at the opening of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, Dunbar's vivid pictures of the grey but lively Edinburgh of his day, Fergusson's spirited etchings of Edinburgh "low life" scenes, the ale-house interior with which Burns opens "Tam o' Shanter"—the family resemblance that runs through all these Scottish poets, so different though they are in so many fundamental respects, must be attributed, perhaps, to the northern climate, which emphasizes the difference between the comfortable fireside within and the bleak weather outside. Like Stevenson's, theirs is the poetry of people who live indoors most of the year, and in whose life the contrast between interiors and exteriors is constantly being driven home. Only Stevenson, whose Colinton days gave him the opportunity to enjoy to the full the brief but memorable outdoor life that a Scottish summer makes possible, adds to these traditional themes that of the wild Edinburgh garden, with all its opportunities for childhood adventure. Later, the moorland and the seacoast were to provide very different open-air experiences, which left their mark on much of his fiction.

The *Child's Garden* thus represents a deliberate attempt on Stevenson's part to recapture the sights, sounds and emotions of his childhood, made at the time when the peace he had finally achieved with his family sent him back to explore those recollections which hitherto he

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

had, in some degree, been forced to suppress. The atmosphere of his early home life, the affectionate care of his nurse Alison Cunningham, to whom the book is dedicated, and above all the essential quality of the city in which he grew up, are all to be found here. Stevenson was perfectly conscious of the nature of his achievement in these poems. They were written, as he said in the "envoy" addressed to his mother, "for love of unforgotten times." And behind all the poems lies the poignant sense of days of innocence for ever over:

But do not think you can at all,
By knocking on the window, call
That child to hear you. He intent
Is all on his play-business bent.
He does not hear; he will not look,
Nor yet be lured out of this book.
For long ago, the truth to say,
He has grown up and gone away,
And it is but a child of air
That lingers in the garden there.

It is the theme he took up again later, in a poem set to the moving Scottish air:

Sing me a song of the lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye. . . .

The morality of these poems is the somewhat prim morality a child will adopt in those rare moments when, self-satisfied and at peace with his environment, he indulges in a complacent feeling of virtue. Stevenson, affectionately reconciled with his family after a long series of

ESSAYS AND POEMS

unhappy crises, sees himself as the little boy who has decided to be good. There is thus a "goody-goody" note in many of these poems which sounds hypocritical, but which in fact represents fairly accurately, though in a deliberately simplified form, Stevenson's mood when he began working on the collection:

It is very nice to think
The world is full of meat and drink,
With little children saying grace
In every Christian kind of place.

And yet the underlying emotion of these verses is an adult one, deriving from adult reminiscence. Anyone who compares the *Garden* with its twentieth century English counterpart—A. A. Milne's *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We Are Six*—will notice this at once. Except for the occasional intrusion of a sophisticated note when dealing with the world of nature (and after Wordsworth no English writers seem to have been able to avoid this note, in some form or other) Milne's poems seem to derive almost entirely from interested observation of a child's behavior and moods, not, as with Stevenson, from passionately retained personal recollection.

The versification in the *Child's Garden* is technically quite accomplished, though on a fairly simple level. Short, simply constructed stanzas, alternating or couplet rhymes, lines varying in length to correspond in a fairly direct way with the nature of the subject—these features enable Stevenson to cope adequately with his subject-matter and at the same time keep all the poetic devices on a level at which they can be readily appre-

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

ciated by a young reader. The book is, in fact, first-rate children's poetry—that is, poetry which uses the devices of the poet naively, not sentimentally or corruptly. Good children's poetry is distinguished from bad by the avoidance of sentimental clichés which so many writers of children's verses seem to consider essential to this species of writing, and is distinguished from adult poetry by its use on a lower or simpler level of the techniques employed with greater subtlety in "full-grown" literature. The underlying emotion which we have noted in Stevenson's poems of childhood is not noticeable as an adult sophistication depriving the poems of their simplicity; it acts as a sort of cohesive agent, giving form and unity to the individual poems and to the collection as a whole, and thus adds to, rather than detracts from, the effective presentation of the theme.

Stevenson's poetic output apart from the *Child's Garden* consists of those youthful *cris de cœur* we have already noted, which were not published until long after his death, and a considerable number of fugitive pieces, descriptive, autobiographical, commemorative or reminiscent, the greater number of which were published in two volumes, *Underwoods* (the title from Ben Jonson), 1887, and *Songs of Travel*, 1896. These poems are all technically competent, unambitious and pleasing "occasional" verse, but for the most part they are clearly the diversions of a prose writer. Now and again, however, the strength of the personal emotion manages to weld the poem into a really impressive lyric. This is particularly true of those nostalgic poems about Scotland, some of which have already been quoted in the preceding pages. He is most

ESSAYS AND POEMS

successful in the elegiac mood and least successful in the heroic. Once, in his memorial poem to a friend and former fellow student who had died young after failing to fulfil the brilliant promise of his early youth, the combination of personal sorrow and the most careful technical endeavour (the poem was re-written and re-polished many times) produced one of the memorable elegies of the century:

Yet, O stricken heart, remember, O remember
How of human days he lived the better part.
April came to bloom and never dim December
Breathing its killing chills upon the head or heart. . . .

For the rest, he is more likely to be successful with a quieter mood, as in the well known "In the Highlands" and "I will make you brooches and toys for your delight." He gets the authentic student mood indirectly but effectively:

A mile an' a bittock, a mile or twa,
Abune the burn, ayont the law,
Davie an' Donal an' Cherlie an' a'
An' the mune was shinin' clearly!

Ane went hame wi' the ither, an' then
The ither went hame wi' the ither twa men,
An' baith wad return him the service again,
An' the mune was shinin' clearly!

The clocks were clappin' in house an' ha',
Eeleeven, twal, an' ane an' twa;
An' the guidman's face was turnt to the wa',
An' the mune was shinin' clearly.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

This is unambitious verse, which is perhaps why it succeeds within its self-imposed limits. A Fergusson or a Burns could by sheer gusto make great poetry out of such themes: Stevenson succeeded only in making good verse. And when he wrote in Scots his literary genealogy is clear. No one who reads

Late in the nicht in bed I lay,
The winds were at their weary play,
An' tirlin' wa's an' skirlin' wae
Through Heev'n they battered;
On-ding o' hail, on-blaff o' spray,
The tempest blattered,

can fail to see Stevenson, like all the other writers of Scots verse of his day, following somewhat dully an old tradition. Fortunately for Stevenson, it was to the unexploited Fergusson rather than to the greater but over-exploited Burns to whom he turned for inspiration, and this helped to keep him from the dreary clutches of the "Whistlebinkie" school of Scots poets. "The Spaewife" has an originality which few Scots poems of the nineteenth century possess:

O! I wad like to ken—to the beggar wife says I—
Why chops are guid to brander and nane sae guid to fry;
An' siller, that's sae braw to keep, is brawer still to gie?
—It's gey an' easy spierin', says the beggar-wife to me.

Stevenson shared with Andrew Lang, Austin Dobson and others a taste for experimenting with complicated mediaeval verse forms, but he was not one of the more successful practitioners. Nor are his ballades worth any serious consideration. The elegiac note of "Requiem"

and the unpretentious swagger of "The Vagabond" represent his greatest success in poetry, though the over-anthologizing of these poems may have made the modern reader a little sick of them. For, after all, Stevenson's poetry is not of the stuff to stand infinite repetition. He would have been the last to claim that himself.

It was as a prose writer that Stevenson thought of himself and as such that his reputation will endure. He amused and relieved himself with poetry, he dabbled in playwriting (an unsuccessful chapter in his literary biography about which little need be said), but his real *métier* was that of the prose story teller. His development from the writer of boys' adventure stories to the author of *Weir of Hermiston* is a remarkable episode in the history of English literature. More accurately, it is an episode in the history of Scottish literature, for, as this study has sought to show, the influences under which Stevenson matured as a novelist derived from the history and topography of his own country. Like Joyce writing of Dublin from his exile in France, Stevenson learned to know his native country best and to make most effective use of it in literature only after he had left it never to return. And just as Joyce is essentially Irish and cannot be fully understood except with reference to Ireland, so Stevenson is essentially Scots and cannot be fully understood without some appreciation of his Scottish background. His greatest achievement was to use nostalgia dramatically, to suppress all personal emotion while utilizing that emotion in serious (sometimes tragic) fiction. This transmuting of autobiographical into aesthetic impulses is an impressive achievement, and, again, one which

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

only Joyce has surpassed. It set a pattern which the literary exiles of the present century have as a rule been slow to follow, to the detriment of their art. In the present age—the age *par excellence* of the literary émigré—Stevenson's work has much to tell us.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

There are many collected editions of Stevenson in both Britain and America and in addition many individual editions of the more popular works. The standard bibliographies are those by W. F. Prideaux (*A Bibliography of the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, New York, 1903; revised by F. V. Livingston, 1917), and J. H. Slater, *A Bibliography of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 1914. Considerable new material on Stevenson has, however, been published since these bibliographies appeared, and the interested reader is referred to the bibliography of Stevenson in the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (New York, Macmillan; Cambridge, England, at the University Press; 1941), Volume III, pp. 520-525, and to T. G. Ehrsam and R. H. Deily, *Bibliographies of Twelve Victorian Authors*, New York, 1936.

The reader who is new to Stevenson and wishes to gain a preliminary acquaintance with his work will be able to make a first selection of books by Stevenson on the basis of the discussion presented in the foregoing pages. He will probably want to read *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, *The Ebb-Tide* and *Weir of Hermiston* as a beginning, together with a selection from the short stories in *New Arabian Nights*, and other short stories such as "The Pavilion on the Links," "Markheim," and "Thrawn Janet." Of the essays, *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, some from *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers* and from *Familiar Studies in Men and Books*, and *Memories and Portraits*, will give a good idea of Stevenson's

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

range, while the poems can be read in any of the collected editions or in *The Poems and Ballads of Robert Louis Stevenson*, New York, 1913. Stevenson's letters were selected and edited by Sidney Colvin and are available in more than one edition (Scribners, New York).

The letters are an important source of Stevenson's biography, and indispensable to anyone who wishes to understand his mind and personality. Of the numerous biographies of Stevenson, Graham Balfour's *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 2 vols., 1901, is still important, in spite of the fact that it presents the sentimentalized view of Stevenson that more recent discoveries have challenged, since it provides intimate glimpses of certain aspects of its subject that are not to be found in many later biographies, as well as fairly full background information on his very early life. Lloyd Osborne's *An Intimate Portrait of R.L.S.*, New York, 1924, is in the same tradition, but is important for its personal knowledge. Rosaline Masson's *Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1923) is still of interest. J. A. Steuart's *Robert Louis Stevenson: Man and Writer. A Critical Biography*, 2 vols., 1924, is disconcertingly pretentious and garrulous in style, but is nevertheless most important as incorporating the results of more recent research and presenting a Stevenson freed from the sentimental legends that had grown up about his life and character. Essential material for the re-appraisal of Stevenson was provided by *Poems, hitherto unpublished*, edited by G. S. Hellman (Bibliophile Society, Boston, 1916); *New Poems and Variant Readings*, 1918; *Stevenson's Workshop*, edited by W. P. Trent, Bibliophile Society, Boston, 1921; and G. S. Hellman's *The True Stevenson, A Study in Clarification*, Boston, 1925. This last book is an important contribution to the true presentation and interpretation of Stevenson's biography.

The many personal recollections of Stevenson which appeared in the twenty years or so after his death each add something to an understanding of the man, though no single one can be counted as a really significant contribution to his biography. Stevenson has long been a favorite subject for sentimental biographical studies, passionate attacks and defences on purely literary grounds, and general chatty discourses. The interested reader will find plenty of such material listed in the bibliographies already cited.

INDEX

INDEX

Across the Plains, 167
Amateur Emigrant, The, 17,
 168

Barrie, Sir James, 99, 138
Baudelaire, Charles, 1, 157
Baxter, Charles, 85, 107, 146
Beach of Falesa, The, 14-15,
 145

Birthday Book for Children, 174
Black Arrow, The, 3, 50-51
Body Snatcher, The, 16
Border Ballads, 76, 81, 110
Bottle Imp, The, 13, 16
Braxfield, Lord, *see* Macqueen,
 Robert.
Brooke, Rupert, 162
Browne, Sir Thomas, 152, 154
Browning, Robert, 2
Buchan, John (Lord Tweeds-
 muir), 1, 19
Burns, Robert, 5, 21, 22, 23, 24,
 180, 181, 186

Caldwell, Erskine, 118
Campbell, Colin, of Glenure,
 51, 53, 59-60, 67, 71
Catriona (title of British edition
 of *David Balfour*), *see* *David
 Balfour*.
Child's Garden of Verses, A, 97,
 164-65, 174-84
“Christmas Sermon, A,” 168-69

“Claire,” 23-24, 89-90, 92, 105-
 06, 129, 139, 173
Cockburn, Henry Thomas, Lord,
 102, 103, 107
Coleridge, S. T., 136
Colvin, Sir Sidney, 77, 79, 103,
 104, 137, 154
Conrad, Joseph, 15

 ‘77
 06,

Dobson, Austin, 186
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 13, 27,
 51, 118
Drummond, Kate, 23-24 (see
 also “Claire”)
Dumas, Alexandre, 10
Dunbar, William, 180, 181
Dynamiter, The, 10-11

Ebb-Tide, The, 104, 141, 144-
 47
“Edinburgh: Picturesque
 Notes,” 165
Encyclopedia Britannica, 21

*Familiar Studies of Men and
 Books*, 21, 169-72

INDEX

Faulkner, William, 118
Fergusson, Robert, 22-23, 180, 181, 186
Fielding, Henry, 5, 21, 22, 171, 172
Footnote to History, A, 168
“Foreign Lands,” 176
“Foreigner at Home, The,” 17
“From a Railway Carriage,” 179

Gaelic elements in Scottish history, Stevenson’s knowledge of, 53-55, 60
Good Companions, The, 9
Gosse, Sir Edmund, 144
“Gossip on Romance, A,” 27, 51, 165
“Gossip on a Novel of Dumas’s, A,” 10
Gray, L. Forbes, 102
Greenaway, Kate, 174

Hardy, Thomas, 139
Hazlitt, William, 157, 160
Hellman, George, 20, 23, 173
Henley, W. E., 8, 46, 169
Henryson, Robert, 8, 180, 181
Hitchcock, Alfred, 27
Hugo, Victor, 171-72
“Humble Remonstrance, A,” 30
Hyde, Rev. Dr. (of Honolulu), 168

“In the Highlands,” 185
Inland Voyage, An, 17, 148, 150-53, 154, 155, 156
Isle of Voices, The, 16

Jacobite Rebellion,
as a theme in Scots literature, 52-53
aftermath of, as an element in *Kidnapped*, 53-58, 61
James, Henry, 78, 141, 144
Joyce, James, 187, 188
Justice-Clerk, The, (original title of *Weir of Hermiston*), 100, 106, 107

Kidnapped, 17, 18, 51-73, 75, 79, 82, 85, 86, 87, 91, 93, 109, 128
King Lear, 111
Kubla Khan, 136

“Land of Counterpane, The,” 175
Lamb, Charles, 155, 157
“Lamplighter, The,” 164
Lang, Andrew, 186
“Lantern Bearers, The,” 165
“Lay Morals,” 169
Letter to Robert Macqueen, Lord Braxfield, 102
Little Minister, The, 188, 139
Lodging for the Night, A, 14

Macdonald, Flora, 60
Macqueen, Robert, Lord Braxfield, 100-03, 105, 107, 115, 139
Magazine of Art, 174
Markheim, 13
Master of Ballantrae, The, 4, 14,

INDEX

29, 74-85, 93, 94, 95, 139,
140, 143
“Memoirs of an Islet,” 163
Memorials of His Time (Cock-
burn), 102, 103
Memories and Portraits, 18, 155,
163
Meredith, George, 139
Merry Men, The, 12-13, 18, 27
Milne, A. A., 183
*Misadventures of John Nichol-
son, The*, 16
Monkhouse, Cosmo, 9
Montaigne, Michel de, 155
Munro, Neil, 19
New Arabian Nights, 5, 6-7, 11-
12, 15, 24, 50, 51
Now We Are Six, 183
Oedipus Rex, 111
Olalla, 15
Ordeal of Richard Feverel, The,
138, 139
Osbourne, Lloyd, 94, 106, 140,
142, 144, 145
Osbourne, Mrs., 23
Pavilion on the Links, The, 12-
13, 14, 27
“Penny Plain and Twopence
Coloured, A,” 18, 165
Penny Whistles (original title of
A Child’s Garden of Verses),
174
“Plea for Gas Lamps, A,” 164
Portfolio, 155
Priestley, J. B., 9
Prince Otto, 29-30, 51, 75
Proust, Marcel, 97-98
Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, 98
“Random Memories,” 165
Redgauntlet, 7, 76, 93
“Requiem,” 186-87
Rob Roy, 96
Romance of the Rose, 30
St. Ives, 94-98, 99, 177
Scots Observer, 168
Scott, Sir Walter, 1, 5, 7, 19, 76,
81, 98, 96, 115, 126, 171, 172
Scribner’s Magazine, 140
Sea Cook, The, (original title of
Treasure Island), 33
Shakespeare, William, 111, 113
Silverado Squatters, The, 167
Sire de Maléroit’s Door, The,
14
Skelt’s Juvenile Drama, 4, 18,
165
“Some Portraits by Raeburn,”
100
Songs of Travel, 184-86
Sophocles, 111
“Spaewife, The,” 186
Steuart, John A., 23
Stevenson, Mrs. R. L. (Fanny
van de Grift), 92
Stevenson, R. A. M., 142
Story of a Lie, The, 16, 108
Strong, Mrs. Isobel, 136, 137
“Swing, The,” 178

INDEX

"Tale of Tod Lapraik, The," 93
"Tam o' Shanter," 181
Testament of Cresseid, 8, 181
Thrawn Janet, 12, 14, 51, 93
Tom Jones, 21, 22
Travels with a Donkey, 17, 148-49, 153-55, 156
Treasure Island, 8, 10, 11, 15, 17, 32-51, 55, 59, 61, 63, 70, 79, 82, 87, 93, 94, 115, 143, 145, 170, 177
Treasure of Franchard, The, 13
Trials of the Sons of Rob Roy, 59
•
Underwoods, 184-86

"Vagabond, The," 187
Vicomte de Bragelonne, Le, 10
Villon, François, 14
Virginibus Puerisque, 100, 155-56, 158

Waddell, Helen, 174
"Walking Tours," 160-61
Wandering Scholars, The, 174
"Wandering Willie's Tale," 93
War in Samoa, 168
Watts-Dunton, Theodore, 61
Weir of Hermiston, 4, 14, 15, 28, 29, 63, 73, 76, 79, 81, 82, 90, 92, 95, 99-140, 143, 145, 147, 148, 151, 162, 187
When We Were Very Young, 183
"Whistlebinkie," 186
Will o' the Mill, 12, 13-14
Wordsworth, William, 24, 157, 183
Wrecker, The, 94, 141-44
Wrong Box, The, 140-41

Young Chevalier, The, 99
Young Folks, 50



